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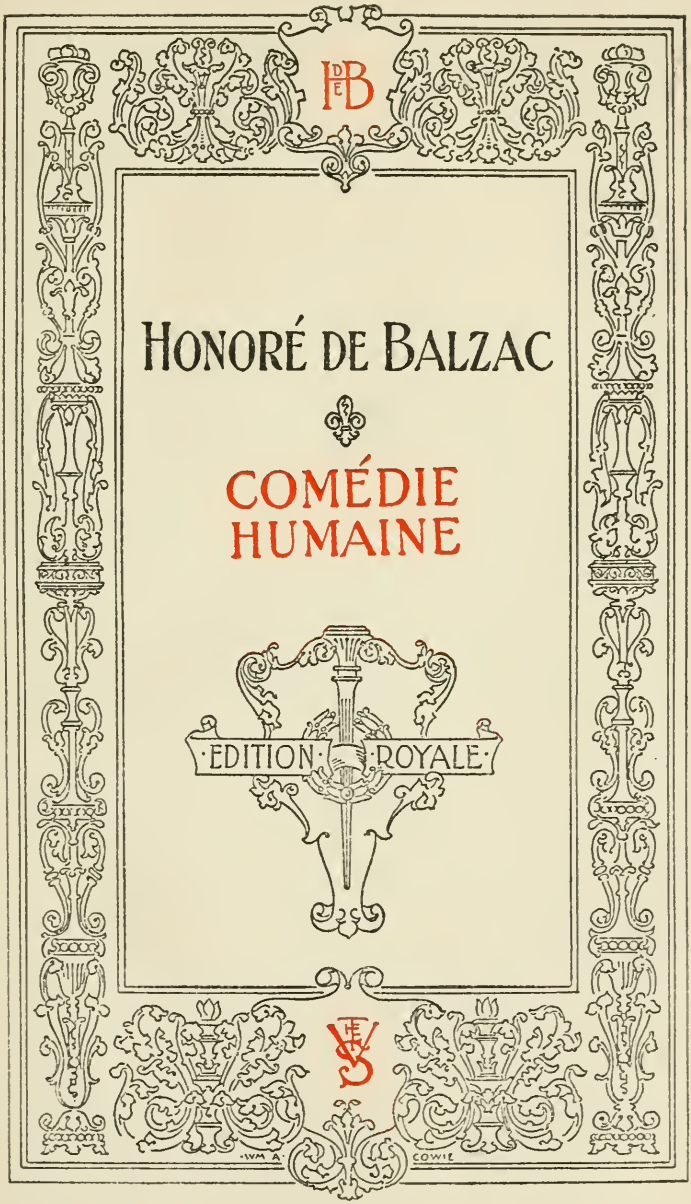
HONORÉ DE BALZAC
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THE WORKS OF HONORÉ·DE·BALZAC

THE · MAGIC · SKIN

(*La Peau de Chagrin*)

AND OTHER STORIES

I

TRANSLATED BY

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

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CONTENTS

PAGE

THE AUTHOR AND HIS WORKS - vii

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION - - liii

INTRODUCTION - - - - lxxi

THE MAGIC SKIN:

I. THE TALISMAN - - - - 1

II. A WOMAN WITHOUT A HEART - - 69

III. THE AGONY - - - - 175

CHRIST IN FLANDERS - - - 273

MELMOTH RECONCILED - - - 293

ILLUSTRATIONS

PHOTOGRAVURES

PORTRAIT OF BALZAC - - - *Frontispiece*
(Redrawn by J. ALLEN ST. JOHN, from Boulanger's sepia drawing in the Musée de Tours)

PAGE

A LITTLE OLD MAN TURNED THE LIGHT OF A LAMP UPON HIM - - - 23

"I WANT PAULINE TO LOVE ME!" HE CRIED NEXT MORNING, LOOKING AT THE TALISMAN THE WHILE IN UNSPEAKABLE ANGUISH - - - - 193

RAPHAEL HURRIEDLY SOUGHT THE MAGIC SKIN TO SEE WHAT ANOTHER MAN'S LIFE HAD COST HIM - - - 250

THE MAGIC SKIN

HONORÉ DE BALZAC.

"Sans génie, je suis flambé!"

Volumes,* almost libraries, have been written about Balzac; and perhaps of very few writers, putting aside the three or four greatest of all, is it so difficult to select one or a few short phrases which will in any way denote them, much more sum them up. Yet the five words quoted above, which come from an early letter to his sister when as yet he had not "found his way," characterize him, I think, better than at least some of the volumes I have read about him, and supply, when they are properly understood, the most valuable of all keys and companions for his comprehension.

"If I have not genius, it is all up with me!" A very matter-of-fact person may say: "Why! there is nothing wonderful in this. Everybody knows that genius is wanted to make a name in literature, and most people think they have it." But this would be a little short-sighted, and only excusable because of the way in which the word "genius" is too commonly bandied about. As a matter of fact, there is not so very much genius in the world; and a great deal of more

* This general introduction attempts to deal chiefly, if not solely, with Balzac's life, and with the general characteristics of his work and genius. Particular books and special exemplifications of that genius will be only incidentally referred to in it; more detailed criticism as well as a summary of the bibliographical information, which is often so interesting and sometimes so important in Balzac's case, being reserved for the short prefaces to the various volumes of the series. I have, however, attempted, while making these short prefaces or introductions independently intelligible and sufficient, to link them to each other and to this general essay, so that the whole may present a sufficient study of Balzac and a sufficient commentary on his work.

than fair performance is attainable and attained by more or less decent allowances or exhibitions of talent. In prose, more especially, it is possible to gain a very high place, and to deserve it, without any genius at all: though it is difficult, if not impossible, to do so in verse. But what Balzac felt (whether he was conscious in detail of the feeling or not) when he used these words to his sister Laure, what his critical readers must feel when they have read only a very little of his work, what they must feel still more strongly when they have read that work as a whole—is that for him there is no such door of escape and no such compromise. He had the choice by his nature, his aims, his capacities, of being a genius or nothing. He had no little gifts, and he was even destitute of some of the separate and divisible great ones. In mere writing, mere style, he was not supreme; one seldom or never derives from anything of his the merely artistic satisfaction given by perfect prose. His humor, except of the grim and gigantic kind, was not remarkable; his wit, for a Frenchman, curiously thin and small. The minor felicities of the literature generally were denied to him. *Sans génie, il était flambé; flambé* as he seemed to be, and very reasonably seemed, to his friends when as yet the genius had not come to him, and when he was desperately striving to discover where his genius lay in those wondrous works which "Lord R'Hoone," and "Horace de Saint Aubin," and others obligingly fathered for him.

It must be the business of these introductions to give what assistance they may to discover where it did lie; it is only necessary, before taking up the task in the regular biographical and critical way of the introductory cicerone, to make two negative observations. It did not lie, as some have ap-

parently thought, in the conception, or the outlining, or the filling up of such a scheme as the *Comédie Humaine.* In the first place the work of every great writer, of the creative kind, including that of Dante himself, is a *comédie humaine.* All humanity is latent in every human being; and the great writers are merely those who call most of it out of latency and put it actually on the stage. And, as students of Balzac know, the scheme and adjustment of his comedy varied so remarkably as time went on that it can hardly be said to have even in its latest form (which would pretty certainly have been altered again) a distinct and definite character. Its so-called scenes (cheap criticism may add and may add truly, though not to much purpose) are even in the mass by no means an exhaustive, and are, as they stand, a very "cross," division of life: nor are they peopled by anything like an exhaustive selection of personages. Nor again is Balzac's genius by any means a mere vindication of the famous definition of that quality as an infinite capacity of taking pains. That Balzac had that capacity—had it in a degree probably unequaled even by the dullest plodders on record, is very well known, is one of the best known things about him. But he showed it for nearly ten years before the genius came, and though no doubt it helped him when genius had come, the two things are in his case, as in most, pretty sufficiently distinct. What the genius itself was I must do my best to indicate hereafter, always beseeching the reader to remember that all genius is in its essence and quiddity indefinable. You can no more get close to it than you can get close to the rainbow, and your most scientific explanation of it will always leave as much of the heart of the fact unexplained as the scientific explanation of the rainbow leaves of that.

Honoré de Balzac was born at Tours on the 16th of May 1799, in the same year which saw the birth of Heine, and which therefore had the honor of producing perhaps the most characteristic (I do not say the greatest) writers of the nineteenth century in prose and verse respectively. The family was a respectable one, though its right to the particle which Balzac always carefully assumed, subscribing himself (with dubious correctness, though the point is an argued one) "*de* Balzac," was contested. And there appears to be no proof of their connection with Jean Guez de Balzac, the founder, as some will have him, of modern French prose, and the contemporary and fellow-reformer of Malherbe.* Balzac's father, who, as the *zac* pretty surely indicates, was a southerner and a native of Languedoc, was fifty-three years old at the birth of his son, whose Christian name was selected on the ordinary principle of accepting that of the saint on whose day he was born. Balzac the elder had been a barrister before the Revolution, but under it he obtained a post in the commissariat, and rose to be head of that department for a military division. His wife, who was much younger than himself and who survived her son, is said to have possessed both beauty and fortune, and was evidently endowed with the business faculties so common among Frenchwomen. When Honoré was born, the family had not long been established at Tours, where Balzac the elder (besides his duties) had a house and some land; and this town continued to be their headquarters till the novelist, who was the eldest of the family, was about sixteen. He had two sisters (of whom the elder, Laure, afterwards Madame Surville, was his first confi-

* Indeed, as the novelist pointed out with sufficient pertinence, his earlier namesake had no hereditary right to the name at all, and merely took it from some property.

dante and his only authoritative biographer) and a younger brother, who seems to have been, if not a scapegrace, rather a burden to his friends, and who later went abroad.

The eldest boy was, in spite of Rousseau, put out to nurse, and at seven years old was sent to the Oratorian grammar-school at Vendôme, where he stayed another seven years, going through, according to his own account, the future experiences and performances of Louis Lambert, but making no reputation for himself in the ordinary school course. If, however, he would not work in his teacher's way, he overworked himself in his own by devouring books; and was sent home at fourteen in such a state of health that his grandmother (who, after the French fashion, was living with her daughter and son-in-law), ejaculated: *"Voilà donc comme le collège nous renvoie les jolis enfants que nous lui envoyons!"* It would seem indeed that, after making all due allowance for grandmotherly and sisterly partiality, Balzac was actually a very good-looking boy and young man, though the portraits of him in later life may not satisfy the more romantic expectations of his admirers. He must have had at all times eyes full of character, perhaps the only feature that never fails in men of intellectual eminence; but he certainly does not seem to have been in his manhood either exactly handsome or exactly (to use a foolish-sounding term which yet has no exact equivalent of better sound) "distinguished-looking." But the portraits of the middle of the century are, as a rule, rather wanting in this characteristic when compared with those of its first and last periods; and I cannot think of many that quite come up to one's expectations.

For a short time he was left pretty much to himself, and recovered rapidly. But late in 1814 a change of official duties

removed the Balzacs to Paris, and when they had established themselves in the famous old *bourgeois* quarter of the Marais, Honoré was sent to divers private tutors or private schools till he had "finished his classes" in 1816 at the age of seventeen and a half. Then he attended lectures at the Sorbonne, where Villemain, Guizot, and Cousin were lecturing, and heard them, as his sister tells us, enthusiastically, though there are probably no three writers of any considerable repute in the history of French literature who stand further apart from Balzac. For all three made and kept their fame by spirited and agreeable generalizations and expatiations, as different as possible from the savage labor of observation on the one hand and the gigantic developments of imagination on the other, which were to compose Balzac's appeal. His father destined him for the law; and for three years more he dutifully attended the offices of an attorney and a notary, besides going through the necessary lectures and examinations. All these trials he seems to have passed, if not brilliantly, yet sufficiently.

And then came the inevitable crisis, which was of an unusually severe nature. A notary, who was a friend of the elder Balzac's and owed him some gratitude, offered not merely to take Honoré into his office, but to allow him to succeed to his business, which was a very good one, in a few years on very favorable terms. Most fathers, and nearly all French fathers, would have jumped at this; and it so happened that about the same time M. de Balzac was undergoing that unpleasant process of compulsory retirement which his son has described in one of the best passages of the *Œuvres de Jeunesse,* the opening scene of *Argow le Pirate.* It does not appear that Honoré had revolted during his probation—

indeed he is said, and we can easily believe it from his books, to have acquired a very solid knowledge of law, especially in bankruptcy matters, of which he was himself to have a very close shave in future. A solicitor, indeed, told Laure de Balzac that he found *César Birotteau* a kind of *Balzac on Bankruptcy;* but this may have been only the solicitor's fun.

It was no part of Honoré's intentions to use this knowledge—however content he had been to acquire it—in the least interesting, if nearly the most profitable, of the branches of the legal profession; and he protested eloquently, and not unsuccessfully, that he would be a man of letters and nothing else. Not unsuccessfully; but at the same time with distinctly qualified success. He was not turned out of doors; nor were the supplies, as in Quinet's case only a few months later, absolutely withheld even for a short time. But his mother (who seems to have been less placable than her husband) thought that cutting them down to the lowest point might have some effect. So, as the family at this time (April 1819) left Paris for a house some twenty miles out of it, she established her eldest son in a garret furnished in the most Spartan fashion, with a starvation allowance and an old woman to look after him. He did not literally stay in this garret for the ten years of his astonishing and unparalleled probation; but without too much metaphor it may be said to have been his Wilderness, and his Wanderings in it to have lasted for that very considerable time.

We know, in detail, very little of him during the period. For the first years, between 1819 and 1822, we have a good number of letters to Laure; between 1822 and 1829, when he first made his mark, very few. He began of course with

verse, for which he never had the slightest vocation, and almost equally of course with a tragedy. But by degrees, and apparently pretty soon, he slipped into what was his vocation, and like some, though not very many, great writers, at first did little better in it than if it had not been his vocation at all. The singular tentatives which, after being allowed for a time a sort of outhouse in the structure of the *Comédie Humaine,* were excluded from the octavo *Édition Définitive* five-and-twenty years ago, have never been the object of that exhaustive bibliographical and critical attention which has been bestowed on those which follow them. They were not absolutely unproductive—we hear of sixty, eighty, a hundred pounds being paid for them, though whether this was the amount of Balzac's always sanguine expectations, or hard cash actually handed over, we cannot say. They were very numerous, though the reprints spoken of above never extended to more than ten. Even these have never been widely read. The only person I ever knew till I began this present task who had read them through was the friend whom all his friends are now lamenting and are not likely soon to cease to lament, Mr. Louis Stevenson; and when I once asked him whether, on his honor and conscience, he could recommend me to brace myself to the same effort, he said that on his honor and conscience he must most earnestly dissuade me. I gather, though I am not sure, that Mr. Wedmore, the latest writer in English on Balzac at any length, had not read them through when he wrote.

Now I have, and a most curious study they are. Indeed I am not sorry, as Mr. Wedmore thinks one would be, to have been for my sins compelled to read them. Nay more, I should have been really sorry if this or some other occasion

had not imposed upon me this particular punishment of the sinner. They are curiously, interestingly, almost enthrallingly bad. Couched for the most part in a kind of Radcliffian or Monk-Lewisian vein—perhaps studied more directly from Maturin (of whom Balzac was a great admirer) than from either—they often begin with and sometimes contain at intervals passages not unlike the Balzac that we know. The attractive title of *Jane la Pale* (it was originally called, with a still more Early Romantic avidity for *baroque* titles, *Wann-Chlore*) has caused it, I believe, to be more commonly read than any other. I know at least three if not four people in England who claim acquaintance with it. It deals with a disguised duke, a villainous Italian, bigamy, a surprising offer (which I wish Balzac had had the courage to represent as accepted and carried out) of the angelic first wife to submit to a sort of double arrangement, the death of the second wife and first love, and a great many other things. *Argow le Pirate* opens quite decently and in order with that story of the *employé* which Balzac was to rehandle so often, but drops suddenly into brigands stopping diligences, the marriage of the heroine Annette with a retired pirate marquis of vast wealth, the trial of the latter for murdering another marquis with a poisoned fish-bone scarf-pin, his execution, the sanguinary reprisals by his redoubtable lieutenant, and a finale of blunderbusses, fire, devoted peasant girl with *retroussé* nose, and almost every possible *tremblement.*

In strictness mention of this should have been preceded by mention of *Le Vicaire des Ardennes,* which is a sort of first part of *Argow le Pirate,* and not only gives an account of his crimes, early history, and manners (which seem to have been a little robustious for such a mild-mannered man as

Annette's husband), but tells a thrilling tale of the loves of the *vicaire* himself and a young woman, which loves are crossed, first by the belief that they are brother and sister, and secondly by the *vicaire* having taken orders under this delusion. *La Dernière Fée* is the queerest possible cross between an actual fairy story *à la* Nodier and a history of the fantastic and inconstant loves of a great English lady, the Duchess of "Sommerset," (a piece of actual *scandalum magnatum* nearly as bad as Balzac's cool use in his acknowledged work of the title "Lord Dudley"). This book begins so well that one expects it to go on better; but the inevitable defects in craftsmanship show themselves before long. *Le Centenaire* connects itself with Balzac's almost lifelong hankering after the *recherche de l'absolu* in one form or another, for the hero is a wicked old person who every now and then refreshes his hold on life by immolating a virgin under a copper bell. It is one of the most extravagant and "Monk-Lewisy" of the whole. *L'Excommunié, L'Israëlite,* and *L'Héritière de Birague* are mediæval or fifteenth century tales of the most luxuriant kind, *L'Excommunié* being the best, *L'Israëlite* the most preposterous, and *L'Héritière de Birague* the dullest. But it is not nearly so dull as *Dom Gigadus* and *Jean Louis,* the former of which deals with the end of the seventeenth century and the latter with the end of the eighteenth. These are both as nearly unreadable as anything can be. One interesting thing, however, should be noted in much of this early work: the affectionate clinging of the author to the scenery of Touraine, which sometimes inspires him with his least bad passages.

It is generally agreed that these singular *Œuvres de Jeunesse* were of service to Balzac as exercises, and no doubt they

were so; but I think something may be said on the other side. They must have done a little, if not much, to lead him into and confirm him in those defects of style and form which distinguish him so remarkably from most writers of his rank. It very seldom happens when a very young man writes very much, be it book-writing or journalism, without censure and without "editing," that he does not at the same time get into loose and slipshod habits. And I think we may set down to this peculiar form of apprenticeship of Balzac's not merely his failure ever to attain, except in passages and patches, a thoroughly great style, but also that extraordinary method of composition which in after days cost him and his publishers so much money.

However, if these ten years of probation taught him his trade, they taught him also a most unfortunate avocation or by-trade, which he never ceased to practise, or to try to practise, which never did him the very least good, and which not unfrequently lost him much of the not too abundant gains which he earned with such enormous labor. This was the "game of speculation." His sister puts the tempter's part on an unknown "neighbor," who advised him to try to procure independence by *une bonne spéculation.* Those who have read Balzac's books and his letters will hardly think that he required much tempting. He began by trying to publish—an attempt which has never yet succeeded with a single man of letters, so far as I can remember. His scheme was not a bad one, indeed it was one which has brought much money to other pockets since, being neither more nor less than the issuing of cheap one-volume editions of French classics. But he had hardly any capital; he was naturally quite ignorant of his trade, and as naturally the established pub-

lishers and booksellers boycotted him as an intruder. So his *Molière* and his *La Fontaine* are said to have been sold as waste paper, though if any copies escaped they would probably fetch a very comfortable price now. Then, such capital as he had having been borrowed, the lender, either out of good nature or avarice, determined to throw the helve after the hatchet. He partly advanced himself and partly induced Balzac's parents to advance more, in order to start the young man as a printer, to which business Honoré himself added that of typefounder. The story was just the same: knowledge and capital were again wanting, and though actual bankruptcy was avoided, Balzac got out of the matter at the cost not merely of giving the two businesses to a friend (in whose hands they proved profitable), but of a margin of debt from which he may be said never to have fully cleared himself.

He had more than twenty years to live, but he never cured himself of this hankering after *une bonne spéculation.* Sometimes it was ordinary stock-exchange gambling; but his special weakness was, to do him justice, for schemes that had something more grandiose in them. Thus, to finish here with the subject, though the chapter of it never actually finished till his death, he made years afterwards, when he was a successful and a desperately busy author, a long, troublesome, and costly journey to Sardinia to carry out a plan of resmelting the slag from Roman and other mines there. Thus in his very latest days, when he was living at Vierzschovnia with the Hanska and Mniszech household, he conceived the magnificently absurd notion of cutting down twenty thousand acres of oak wood in the Ukraine, and sending it *by railway* right across Europe to be sold in France. And he was rather reluctantly convinced that by the time a single

log reached its market the freight would have eaten up the value of a whole plantation.

It was perhaps not entirely chance that the collapse of the printing scheme which took place in 1827, the ninth year of the Wanderings in the Wilderness, coincided with or immediately preceded the conception of the book which was to give Balzac passage into the Promised Land. This was *Les Chouans,* called at its first issue, which differed considerably from the present form, *Le Dernier Chouan ou la Bretagne en* 1800 (later 1799). It was published in 1829 without any of the previous anagrammatic pseudonyms; and whatever were the reasons which had induced him to make his bow in person to the public, they were well justified, for the book was a distinct success, if not a great one. It occupies a kind of middle position between the melodramatic romance of his nonage and the strictly analytic romance-novel of his later time; and, though dealing with war and love chiefly, inclines in conception distinctly to the latter. Corentin, Hulot, and other personages of the actual Comedy (then by no means planned or at least avowed) appear; and though the influence of Scott is in a way paramount* on the surface, the underwork is quite different, and the whole scheme of the loves of Montauran and Mademoiselle de Verneuil is pure Balzac.

It would seem as if nothing but this sun of popular ap-

* Balzac was throughout his life a fervent admirer of Sir Walter, and I think Mr. Wedmore, in his passage on the subject, distinctly undervalues both the character and the duration of this esteem. Balzac was far too acute to commit the common mistake of thinking Scott superficial—men who know mankind are not often blind to each other's knowledge. And while Mr. Wedmore seems not to know any testimony later than Balzac's *thirty-eighth* year, it is in his *forty-sixth*, when all his own best work was done, except the *Parents Pauvres*, that he contrasts Dumas with Scott, saying that *on relit Walter Scott*, and he does not think any one will re-read Dumas. This may be unjust to the one writer, but it is conclusive as to any sense of "wasted time" (his own phrase) having ever existed in Balzac's mind about the other.

proval had been wanted to make Balzac's genius burst out in full bloom. Although we have a fair number of letters for the ensuing years, it is not very easy to make out the exact sequence of production of the marvelous harvest which his genius gave. It is sufficient to say that in the three years following 1829 there were actually published the *Physiologie du Mariage* (of which, as it is not a novel, and for that and other reasons will not appear in this series, not much more will have to be said), the charming story of *La Maison du Chat-qui-Pelote,* the *Peau de Chagrin,* the most original and splendid, if not the most finished and refined of all Balzac's books, most of the short *Contes Philosophiques,* of which some are among their author's greatest triumphs, many other stories (chiefly included in the *Scènes de la Vie Privée*) and the beginning of the *Contes Drolatiques.**

But without a careful examination of his miscellaneous work, which is very abundant and includes journalism as well as books, it is almost as impossible to come to a just appreciation of Balzac as it is without reading the early works and the letters. This miscellaneous work is all the more important because a great deal of it represents the artist at quite advanced stages of his career, and because all its

* No regular attempt will after this be made to indicate the date of production of successive works, unless they connect themselves very distinctly with incidents in the life or with general critical observations. At the end of this introduction will be found a full table of the *Comédie Humaine* and the other works; while, as explained in the first note, additional bibliographical information, as to dates and otherwise, will be found in the short introductions to each volume. It may perhaps be worth while to add here, that while the labors of M. de Lovenjoul (to whom every writer on Balzac must acknowledge the deepest obligation) have cleared this matter up almost to the verge of possibility as regards the published works, there is little light to be thrown on the constant references in the letters to books which never appeared. Sometimes they are known, and they may often be suspected, to have been absorbed into or incorporated with others; the rest must have been lost or destroyed, or, which is not quite impossible, have existed chiefly in the form of project. Nearly a hundred titles of such things are preserved.

examples, the earlier as well as the later, give us abundant insight on him as he was "making himself." The comparison with the early work of Thackeray (in *Punch, Fraser,* and elsewhere) is so striking that it can escape no one who knows the two. Every now and then Balzac transferred bodily, or with slight alterations, passages from these experiments to his finished canvases. It appears that he had a scheme for codifying his "Physiologies" (of which the notorious one above mentioned is only a catchpenny exemplar and very far from the best) into a seriously organized work. Chance was kind or intention was wise in not allowing him to do so; but the value of the things for the critical reader is not less. Here are tales—extensions of the scheme and manner of the *Œuvres de Jeunesse,* or attempts (not often happy) at the *goguenard* story of 1830—a thing for which Balzac's hand was hardly light enough. Here are interesting evidences of striving to be cosmopolitan and polyglot—the most interesting of all of which, I think, is the mention of certain British products as "mufflings." "Muffling" used to be a domestic joke for "muffin;" but whether some wicked Briton deluded Balzac into the idea that it was the proper form or not it is impossible to say. Here is a *Traité de la Vie Elégante,* inestimable for certain critical purposes. So early as 1825 we find a *Code des Gens Honnêtes,* which exhibits at once the author's legal studies and his constant attraction for the shady side of business, and which contains a scheme for defrauding by means of lead pencils, actually carried out (if we may believe his exulting note) by some literary swindlers with unhappy results. A year later he wrote a *Dictionnaire des Enseignes de Paris,* which we are glad enough to have from the author of the *Chat-qui-Pelote;* but the persist-

ence with which this kind of miscellaneous writing occupied him could not be better exemplified than by the fact that, of two important works which closely follow this in the collected edition, the *Physiologie de l'Employé* dates from 1841 and the *Monographie de la Presse Parisienne* from 1843.

It is well known that from the time almost of his success as a novelist he was given, like too many successful novelists (*not* like Scott), to rather undignified and foolish attacks on critics. The explanation may or may not be found in the fact that we have abundant critical work of his, and that it is nearly all bad. Now and then we have an acute remark in his own special sphere; but as a rule he cannot be complimented on these performances, and when he was half-way through his career this critical tendency of his culminated in the unlucky *Revue Parisienne,* which he wrote almost entirely himself, with slight assistance from his friends, MM. de Belloy and de Grammont. It covers a wide range, but the literary part of it is considerable, and this part contains that memorable and disastrous attack on Sainte-Beuve, for which the critic afterwards took a magnanimous revenge in his obituary *causerie.* Although the thing is not quite unexampled it is not easily to be surpassed in the blind fury of its abuse. Sainte-Beuve was by no means invulnerable, and an anti-critic who kept his head might have found, as M. de Pontmartin and others did find, the joints in his armor. But when, apropos of the *Port Royal* more especially, and of the other works in general, Balzac informs us that Sainte-Beuve's great characteristic as a writer is *l'ennui, l'ennui boueux jusqu'à mi-jambe,* that his style is intolerable, that his historical handling is like that of Gibbon, Hume, and other dull people when he jeers at him for

exhuming "La mère Angélique," and scolds him for presuming to obscure the glory of the *Roi Soleil,* the thing is partly ludicrous, partly melancholy. One remembers that agreeable Bohemian, who at a symposium once interrupted his host by crying, "Man o' the hoose, gie us less o' yer clack and mair o' yer Jairman wine!" Only, in human respect and other, we phrase it: "Oh, dear M. de Balzac! give us more *Eugénie Grandets,* more *Père Goriots,* more *Peaux de Chagrin,* and don't talk about what you do not understand!"

Balzac was a great politician also, and here, though he may not have been very much more successful, he talked with more knowledge and competence. He must have given himself immense trouble in reading the papers, foreign as well as French; he had really mastered a good deal of the political religion of a French publicist. It is curious to read, sixty years after date, his grave assertion that *"La France a la conquête de Madagascar à faire,"* and with certain very pardonable defects (such as his Anglophobia), his politics may be pronounced not unintelligent and not ungenerous, though somewhat inconsistent and not very distinctly traceable to any coherent theory. As for the Anglophobia, the Englishman who thinks the less of him for that must have very poor and unhappy brains. A Frenchman who does not more or less hate and fear England, an Englishman who does not regard France with a more or less good-humored impatience, is usually "either a god or a beast," as Aristotle saith. Balzac began with an odd but not unintelligible compound, something like Hugo's, of Napoleonism and Royalism. In 1824, when he was still in the shades of anonymity, he wrote and published two by no means despicable pamphlets in favor of Primogeniture and the Jesuits, the latter of which was reprinted

in 1880 at the last *Jesuitenhetze* in France. His *Lettres sur Paris* in 1830-31, and his *La France et l'Etranger* in 1836, are two considerable series of letters from "Our Own Correspondent," handling the affairs of the world with boldness and industry if not invariably with wisdom. They rather suggest (as does the later *Revue Parisienne* still more) the political writing of the age of Anne in England, and perhaps a little later, when "the wits" handled politics and society, literature and things in general with unquestioned competence and an easy universality.

The rest of his work which will not appear in this edition may be conveniently despatched here. The *Physiologie du Mariage* and the *Scènes de la Vie Conjugale* suffer not merely from the most obvious of their faults but from defect of knowledge. It may or may not be that marriage, in the hackneyed phrase, is a net or other receptacle where all the outsiders would be in, and all the insiders out. But it is quite clear that Cœlebs cannot talk of it with much authority. His state may or may not be the more gracious: his judgment cannot but lack experience. The "Theatre," which brought its author little if any profit, great annoyance, and a vast amount of trouble, has been generally condemned by criticism. But the *Contes Drolatiques* are not so to be given up. The famous and splendid *Succube* is only the best of them, and though all are more or less tarred with the brush which tars so much of French literature, though the attempt to write in an archaic style is at best a very successful *tour de force,* and represents an expenditure of brain power by no means justifiable on the part of a man who could have made so much better use of it, they are never to be spoken of disrespectfully. Those who sneer at their "Wardour Street"

Old French are not usually those best qualified to do so; and it is not to be forgotten that Balzac was a real countryman of Rabelais and a legitimate inheritor of *Gauloiserie.* Unluckily no man can "throw back" in this way, except now and then as a mere pastime. And it is fair to recollect that as a matter of fact Balzac, after a year or two, did not waste much more time on these things, and that the intended ten *dizains* never, as a matter of fact, went beyond three.

Besides this work in books, pamphlets, etc., Balzac, as has been said, did a certain amount of journalism, especially in the *Caricature,* his performances including, I regret to say, more than one puff of his own work; and in this, as well as by the success of the *Chouans,* he became known about 1830 to a much wider circle, both of literary and of private acquaintance. It cannot indeed be said that he ever mixed much in society; it was impossible that he should do so, considering the vast amount of work he did and the manner in which he did it. This subject, like that of his speculations, may be better finished off in a single passage than dealt with by scattered indications here and there. He was not one of those men who can do work by fits and starts in the intervals of business or of amusement; nor was he one who, like Scott, could work very rapidly. It is true that he often achieved immense quantities of work (subject to a caution to be given presently) in a very few days, but then his working day was of the most peculiar character. He could not bear disturbance; he wrote (as probably most people do) best at night, and he could not work at all after heavy meals. His favorite plan (varied sometimes in detail) was therefore to dine lightly about five or six, then to go to bed and sleep till eleven, twelve, or one, and then to get up, and with the help

only of coffee (which he drank very strong and in enormous quantities) to work for indefinite stretches of time into the morning or afternoon of the next day. He speaks of a sixteen hours' day as a not uncommon shift or spell of work, and almost a regular one with him; and on one occasion he avers that in the course of forty-eight hours he took but three of rest, working for twenty-two hours and a half continuously on each side thereof. In such spells, supposing reasonable facility of composition and mechanical power in the hand to keep going all the time, an enormous amount can of course be accomplished. A thousand words an hour is anything but an extraordinary rate of writing, and fifteen hundred by no means unheard of with persons who do not write rubbish.

The references to this subject in Balzac's letters are very numerous; but it is not easy to extract very definite information from them. It would be not only impolite but incorrect to charge him with unveracity. But the very heat of imagination which enabled him to produce his work created a sort of mirage, through which he seems always to have regarded it; and in writing to publishers, editors, creditors, and even his own family, it was too obviously his interest to make the most of his labor, his projects, and his performance. Even his contemporary, though elder, Southey, the hardest-working and the most scrupulously honest man of letters in England who could pretend to genius, seems constantly to have exaggerated the idea of what he could perform, if not of what he had performed in a given time. The most definite statement of Balzac's that I remember is one which claims the second number of *Sur Catherine de Medicis*, "La Confidence des Ruggieri" as the production of a single

night, and not one of the most extravagant of his nights. Now "La Confidence des Ruggieri" fills, in the small edition, eighty pages of nearer four hundred than three hundred words each, or some thirty thousand words in all. Nobody in the longest of nights could manage that, except by dictating it to shorthand clerks. But in the very context of this assertion Balzac assigns a much longer period to the correction than to the composition, and this brings us to one of the most curious and one of the most famous points of his literary history.

Some doubts have, I believe, been thrown on the most minute account of his ways of composition which we have, that of the publisher Werdet. But there is too great a consensus of evidence as to his general system to make the received description of it doubtful. According to this, the first draft of Balzac's work never presented it in anything like fulness, and sometimes did not amount to a quarter of the bulk finally published. This being returned to him from the printer in "slip" on sheets with very large margins, he would set to work on the correction; that is to say on the practical rewriting of the thing, with excisions, alterations, and above all, additions. A "revise" being executed, he would attack this revise in the same manner, and not unfrequently more than once, so that the expenses of mere composition and correction of the press were enormously heavy (so heavy as to eat into not merely his publisher's but his own profits), and that the last state of the book, when published, was something utterly different from its first state in manuscript. And it will be obvious that if anything like this was usual with him, it is quite impossible to judge his actual rapidity of composition by the extent of the published result.

However this may be (and it is at least certain that in the years above referred to he must have worked his very hardest, even if some of the work then published had been more or less excogitated and begun during the Wilderness period), he certainly so far left his eremitical habits as to become acquainted with most of the great men of letters of the early thirties, and also with certain ladies of more or less high rank, who were to supply, if not exactly the full models, the texts and starting-points for some of the most interesting figures of the *Comédie.* He knew Victor Hugo, but certainly not at this time intimately; for as late as 1839 the letter in which he writes to Hugo to come and breakfast with him at Les Jardies (with interesting and minute directions how to find that frail abode of genius) is couched in anything but the tone of a familiar friendship. The letters to Beyle of about the same date are also incompatible with intimate knowledge. Nodier (after some contrary expressions) he seems to have regarded as most good people did regard that true man of letters and charming tale-teller; while among the younger generation Théophile Gautier and Charles de Bernard, as well as Goslan and others, were his real and constant friends. But he does not figure frequently or eminently in any of the genuine gossip of the time as a haunter of literary circles, and it is very nearly certain that the assiduity with which some of his heroes attend *salons* and clubs had no counterpart in his own life. In the first place he was too busy; in the second he would not have been at home there. Like the young gentleman in *Punch,* who "did not read books but wrote them," though in no satiric sense, he felt it his business not to frequent society but to create it.

He was, however, aided in the task of creation by the

ladies already spoken of, who were fairly numerous and of divers degrees. The most constant after his sister Laure was that sister's schoolfellow, Madame Zulma Carraud, the wife of a military official at Angoulême and the possessor of a small country estate at Frapesle, near Tours. At both of these places Balzac, till he was a very great man, was a constant visitor, and with Madame Carraud he kept up for years a correspondence which has been held to be merely friendly, and which was certainly in the vulgar sense innocent, but which seems to me to be tinged with something of that feeling, midway between love and friendship, which appears in Scott's letters to Lady Abercorn, and which is probably not so rare as some think. Madame de Berny, another family friend of higher rank, was the prototype of most of his "angelic" characters, but she died in 1836. He knew the Duchesse d'Abrantès, otherwise Madame Junot, and Madame de Girardin, otherwise Delphine Gay; but neither seems to have exercised much influence over him. It was different with another and more authentic duchess, Madame de Castries, after whom he dangled for a considerable time, who certainly first encouraged him and probably then snubbed him, and who is thought to have been the model of his wickeder great ladies. And it was comparatively early in the thirties that he met the woman whom, after nearly twenty years, he was at last to marry, getting his death in so doing, the Polish Madame Hanska. These, with some relations of the last named, especially her daughter, and with a certain "Louise"—an *Inconnue* who never ceased to be so—were Balzac's chief correspondents of the other sex, and as far as is known, his chief friends in it.

About his life, without extravagant "padding" of guess-

work or of mere quotation and abstract of his letters, it would be not so much difficult as impossible to say much; and accordingly it is a matter of fact that most lives of Balzac, including all good ones, are rather critical than narrative. From his real *début* with *Le Dernier Chouan* to his departure for Poland on the long visit, or brace of visits, from which he returned finally to die, this life consisted solely of work. One of his earliest utterances, *"Il faut piocher ferme,"* was his motto to the very last, varied only by a certain amount of traveling. Balzac was always a considerable traveler; indeed if he had not been so his constitution would probably have broken down long before it actually did; and the expense of these voyagings (though by his own account he generally conducted his affairs with the most rigid economy), together with the interruption to his work which they occasioned, entered no doubt for something into his money difficulties. He would go to Baden or Vienna for a day's sight of Madame Hanska; his Sardinian visit has been already noted; and as a specimen of others it may be mentioned that he once journeyed from Paris to Besançon, then from Besançon right across France to Angoulême, and then back to Paris on some business of selecting paper for one of the editions of his books, which his publishers would probably have done much better and at much less expense.

Still his actual receipts were surprisingly small, partly, it may be, owing to his expensive habits of composition, but far more, according to his own account, because of the Belgian piracies, from which all popular French authors suffered till (I think) the government of Napoleon the Third managed to put a stop to them. He also lived in such a thick atmosphere of bills and advances and cross-claims on and

by his publishers, that even if there were more documents than there are it would be exceedingly difficult to get at facts which are, after all, not very important. He never seems to have been paid much more than £500 for the newspaper publication (the most valuable by far because the pirates could not interfere with its profits) of any one of his novels. And to expensive fashions of composition and complicated accounts, a steady back-drag of debt and the rest, must be added the very delightful, and to a novelist not useless, but very expensive mania of the collector. Balzac had a genuine taste for, and thought himself a genuine connoisseur in, pictures, sculpture, and objects of art of all kinds, old and new; and though prices in his day were not what they are in these, a great deal of money must have run through his hands in this way. He calculated the value of the contents of the house, which in his last days he furnished with such loving care for his wife, and which turned out to be a chamber rather of death than of marriage, at some £16,000. But part of this was of Madame Hanska's own purchasing, and there were offsets of indebtedness against it almost to the last. In short, though during the last twenty years of his life such actual "want of pence" as vexed him was not due, as it had been earlier, to the fact that the pence refused to come in, but only to imprudent management of them, it certainly cannot be said that Honoré de Balzac, the most desperately hard worker in all literature for such time as was allotted him, and perhaps the man of greatest genius who was ever a desperately hard worker, falsified that most uncomfortable but truest of proverbs—"Hard work never made money."

If, however, he was but scantily rewarded with the money for which he had a craving (not absolutely, I think, devoid

of a touch of genuine avarice, but consisting chiefly of the artist's desire for pleasant and beautiful things, and partly presenting a variety or phase of the grandiose imagination, which was his ruling characteristic), Balzac had plenty of the fame, for which he cared quite as much as he cared for money. Perhaps no writer except Voltaire and Goethe earlier made such a really European reputation; and his books were of a kind to be more widely read by the general public than either Goethe's or Voltaire's. In England (Balzac liked the literature but not the country, and never visited England, though I believe he planned a visit) this popularity was, for obvious reasons, rather less than elsewhere. The respectful vogue which French literature had had with the English in the eighteenth century had ceased, owing partly to the national enmity revived and fostered by the great war, and partly to the growth of a fresh and magnificent literature at home during the first thirty years of the nineteenth in England. But Balzac could not fail to be read almost at once by the lettered; and he was translated pretty early, though not perhaps to any great extent. It was in England, moreover, that by far his greatest follower appeared, and appeared very shortly. For it would be absurd in the most bigoted admirer of Thackeray to deny that the author of *Vanity Fair,* who was in Paris and narrowly watching French literature and French life at the very time of Balzac's most exuberant flourishing and education, owed something to the author of *Le Père Goriot.* There was no copying or imitation; the lessons taught by Balzac were too much blended with those of native masters, such as Fielding, and too much informed and transformed by individual genius. Some may think—it is a point at issue not merely between Frenchmen and Englishmen, but be-

tween good judges of both nations on each side—that in absolute veracity and likeness to life, in limiting the operation of the inner consciousness on the outward observation to strictly artistic scale. Thackeray excelled Balzac as far as he fell short of him in the powers of the seer and in the gigantic imagination of the prophet. But the relations of pupil and master in at least some degree are not, I think, deniable.

So things went on in light and in shade, in homekeeping and in travel, in debts and in earnings, but always in work of some kind or another, for eighteen years from the turning point of 1829. By degrees, as he gained fame and ceased to be in the most pressing want of money, Balzac left off to some extent, though never entirely, those miscellaneous writings—reviews (including puffs), comic or general sketches, political diatribes, "physiologies" and the like—which, with his discarded prefaces and much more interesting matter, were at last, not many years ago, included in four stout volumes of the *Édition Définitive.* With the exception of the *Physiologies* (a sort of short satiric analysis of this or that class, character, or personage), which were very popular in the reign of Louis Philippe in France, and which Albert Smith and others introduced into England, Balzac did not do any of this miscellaneous work extremely well. Very shrewd observations are to be found in his reviews, for instance his indication, in reviewing La Touche's *Fragoletta,* of that common fault of ambitious novels, a sort of woolly and "ungraspable" looseness of construction and story, which constantly bewilders the reader as to what is going on. But, as a rule, he was thinking too much of his own work and his own principles of working to enter very thoroughly into the work of

others. His politics, those of a moderate but decided Royalist and Conservative, were, as has been said, intelligent in theory, but in practice a little distinguished by that neglect of actual business detail which has been noticed in his speculations.

At last, in the summer of 1847, it seemed as if the Rachel for whom he had served nearly if not quite the full fourteen years already, and whose husband had long been out of the way, would at last grant herself to him. He was invited to Vierzschovnia, in the Ukraine, the seat of Madame Hanska, or in strictness of her son-in-law, Count Georges Mniszech; and as the visit was apparently for no restricted period, and Balzac's pretensions to the lady's hand were notorious, it might have seemed that he was as good as accepted. But to assume this would have been to mistake what perhaps the greatest creation of Balzac's great English contemporary and counterpart on the one side, as Thackeray was his contemporary and counterpart on the other, considered to be the malignity of widows. What the reasons were which made Madame Hanska delay so long in doing what she did at last, and might just as well, it would seem, have done years before, is not certainly known, and it would be quite unprofitable to discuss them. But it was on the 8th of October 1847 that Balzac first wrote to his sister fromVierzschovnia, and it was not till the 14th of March 1850 that, "in the parish church of Saint Barbara at Berditchef, by the Count Abbé Czarski, representing the Bishop of Jitomir [this as characteristic of Balzac in one way as what follows is in another] a Madame Eve de Balzac, born Countess Rzevuska, or a Madame Honoré de Balzac or a Madame de Balzac the elder" came into existence.

It does not appear that Balzac was exactly unhappy during this huge probation, which was broken by one short visit to Paris. The interest of uncertainty was probably much for his ardent and unquiet spirit, and though he did very little literary work for him, one may suspect that he would not have done very much if he had stayed at Paris, for signs of exhaustion, not of genius but of physical power, had shown themselves before he left home. But it is not unjust or cruel to say that by the delay "Madame Eve de Balzac" (her actual baptismal name was Evelina) practically killed her husband. These winters in the severe climate of Russian Poland were absolutely fatal to a constitution, and especially to lungs, already deeply affected. At Vierzschovnia itself he had illnesses, from which he narrowly escaped with life, before the marriage; his heart broke down after it; and he and his wife did not reach Paris till the end of May. Less than three months afterwards, on the 18th of August, he died, having been visited on the very day of his death in the Paradise of bric-à-brac which he had created for his Eve in the Rue Fortunée—a name too provocative of Nemesis—by Victor Hugo, the chief maker in verse as he himself was the chief maker in prose of France. He was buried at Père la Chaise. The after-fortunes of his house and its occupants were not happy: but they do not concern us.

In person Balzac was a typical Frenchman, as indeed he was in most ways. From his portraits there would seem to have been more force and address than distinction or refinement in his appearance, but, as has been already observed, his period was one ungrateful to the iconographer. His character, not as a writer but as a man, must occupy us a little longer. For some considerable time—indeed it may be said until the publication of his letters—it was not very favorably

judged on the whole. We may, of course, dismiss the childish scandals (arising, as usual, from clumsy or malevolent misinterpretation of such books as the *Physiologie de Mariage,* the *Peau de Chagrin,* and a few others), which gave rise to caricatures of him such as that of which we read, representing him in a monk's dress at a table covered with bottles and supporting a young person on his knee, the whole garnished with the epigraph: Scènes de la Vie Cachée. They seem to have given him, personally, a very unnecessary annoyance, and indeed he was always rather sensitive to criticism. This kind of stupid libel will never cease to be devised by the envious, swallowed by the vulgar, and simply neglected by the wise. But Balzac's peculiarities, both of life and of work, lent themselves rather fatally to a subtler misconstruction which he also anticipated and tried to remove, but which took a far stronger hold. He was represented—and in the absence of any intimate male friends to contradict the representation, it was certain to obtain some currency—as in his artistic person a sardonic libeler of mankind, who cared only to take foibles and vices for his subjects, and who either left goodness and virtue out of sight altogether, or represented them as the qualities of fools. In private life he was held up as at the best a self-centered egotist who cared for nothing but himself and his own work, capable of interrupting one friend who told him of the death of a sister by a suggestion that they should change the subject and talk of "something real, of *Eugénie Grandet,*" and of levying a fifty per cent commission on another who had written a critical notice of his, Balzac's, life and works.*

* Sandeau and Gautier, the victims in these two stories, were neither spiteful, nor mendacious, nor irrational, so they are probably true. The second was possibly due to Balzac's odd notions of "business being business." The first, I have quite recently seen reason to think, may have been a sort of reminiscence of one of the traits in Diderot's extravagant encomium on Richardson.

With the first of these charges he himself, on different occasions, rather vainly endeavored to grapple, once drawing up an elaborate list of his virtuous and vicious women, and showing that the former outnumbered the latter; and, again, laboring (with that curious lack of sense of humor which distinguishes all Frenchmen but a very few, and distinguished him eminently) to show that though no doubt it is very difficult to make a virtuous person interesting, he, Honoré de Balzac, had attempted it, and succeeded in it, on a quite surprising number of occasions.

The fact is that if he had handled this last matter rather more lightly his answer would have been a sufficient one, and that in any case the charge is not worth answering. It does not lie against the whole of his work; and if it lay as conclusively as it does against Swift's, it would not necessarily matter. To the artist in analysis as opposed to the romance-writer, folly always, and villainy sometimes, does supply a much better subject than virtuous success, and if he makes his fools and his villains lifelike and supplies them with a fair contrast of better things, there is nothing more to be said. He will not, indeed, be a Shakespeare, or a Dante, or even a Scott; but we may be very well satisfied with him as a Fielding, a Thackeray, or a Balzac. As to the more purely personal matter I own that it was some time before I could persuade myself that Balzac, to speak familiarly, was a much better fellow than others, and I myself, had been accustomed to think him. But it is also some time since I came to the conclusion that he was so, and my conversion is not to be attributed to any editorial retainer. His education in a lawyer's office, the accursed advice about the *bonne spéculation,* and his constant straitenings for money.

will account for his sometimes looking after the main chance rather too narrowly; and as for the Eugénie Grandet story (even if the supposition referred to in a note above be fanciful) it requires no great stretch of charity or comprehension to see in it nothing more than the awkward, very easily misconstrued, but not necessarily in the least heartless or brutal attempt of a rather absent and very much self-centered recluse absorbed in one subject, to get his interlocutor as well as himself out of painful and useless dwelling on sorrowful matters. Self-centered and self-absorbed Balzac no doubt was; he could not have lived his life or produced his work if he had been anything else. And it must be remembered that he owed extremely little to others; that he had the independence as well as the isolation of the self-centered; that he never sponged or fawned on a great man, or wronged others of what was due to them. The only really unpleasant thing about him that I know, and even this is perhaps due to ignorance of all sides of the matter, is a slight touch of snobbishness now and then, especially in those late letters from Vierzschovnia to Madame de Balzac and Madame Surville, in which, while inundating his mother and sister with commissions and requests for service, he points out to them what great people the Hanskas and Mniszechs are, what infinite honor and profit it will be to be connected with them, and how desirable it is to keep struggling engineer brothers-in-law and ne'er-do-well brothers in the colonies out of sight lest they should disgust the magnates.

But these are "sma' sums, sma' sums," as Bailie Jarvie says; and smallness of any kind has, whatever it may have to do with Balzac the man, nothing to do with Balzac the writer. With him as with some others, but not as with the larger

number, the sense of *greatness* increases the longer and the more fully he is studied. He resembles, I think, Goethe more than any other man of letters—certainly more than any other of the present century—in having done work which is very frequently, if not even commonly, faulty, and in yet requiring that his work shall be known as a whole. His appeal is cumulative; it repeats itself on each occasion with a slight difference, and though there may now and then be the same faults to be noticed, they are almost invariably accompanied, not merely by the same, but by fresh merits.

As has been said at the beginning of this essay, no attempt will be made in it to give that running survey of Balzac's work which is always useful and sometimes indispensable in treatment of the kind. That will be administered in brief introductions to the separate novels or collections of tales of which each, it is hoped, will itself be cumulative and help to furnish forth the full presentment of the subject. But something like a summing up of that subject will here be attempted, first, because of the manifest inconvenience of postponing it, and secondly, because it is really desirable that in embarking on so vast a voyage the reader should have some general chart—some notes of the soundings and log generally of those who have gone before him.

There are two things, then, which it is more especially desirable to keep constantly before one in reading Balzac—two things which, taken together, constitute his almost unique value, and two things (I think it may be added) which not a few critics have failed to take together in him, being under the impression that the one excludes the other, and that to admit the other is tantamount to a denial of the one. These two things are, first, an immense attention to detail, some-

times observed, sometimes invented or imagined; and secondly, a faculty of regarding these details through a mental lens or arrangement of lenses almost peculiar to himself, which at once combines, enlarges, and invests them with a peculiar magical halo or mirage. The two thousand personages of the *Comédie Humaine* are, for the most part, "signaled," as the French official word has it, marked and denoted by the minutest traits of character, gesture, gait, clothing, abode, what not; the transactions recorded are very often (more often indeed than not) given with a scrupulous and microscopic accuracy of reporting which no detective could outdo. Defoe is not more circumstantial in detail of fact than Balzac; Richardson is hardly more prodigal of character-stroke. Yet a very large proportion of these characters, of these circumstances, are evidently things invented or imagined, not observed. And in addition to this the artist's magic glass, his Balzacian speculum, if we may so say (for none else has ever had it) transforms even the most rigid observation into something flickering and fanciful, the outline as of shadows on the wall, not the precise contour of etching or of the camera.

It is curious, but not unexampled, that both Balzac himself when he struggled in argument with his critics and those of his partisans who have been most jealously devoted to him, have usually tried to exalt the first and less remarkable of these gifts over the second and infinitely more remarkable. Balzac protested strenuously against the use of the word "gigantesque" in reference to his work; and of course it is susceptible of an unhandsome innuendo. But if we leave that innuendo aside, if we adopt the sane reflection that "gigantesque" does not exclude "gigantic," or assert a con-

stant failure of greatness, but only indicates that the magnifying process is carried on with a certain indiscriminateness, we shall find none, I think, which so thoroughly well describes him.

The effect of this singular combination of qualities, apparently the most opposite, may be partly anticipated, but not quite. It results occasionally in a certain shortcoming as regards *vérité vraie,* absolute artistic truth to nature. Those who would range Balzac in point of such artistic veracity on a level with poetical and universal realists like Shakespeare and Dante, or prosaic and particular realists like Thackeray and Fielding, seem not only to be utterly wrong but to pay their idol the worst of all compliments, that of ignoring his own special qualifications. The province of Balzac may not be—I do not think it is—identical, much less co-extensive, with that of nature. But it is his own—a partly real partly fantastic region, where the lights, the shades, the dimensions, and the physical laws are slightly different from those of this world of ours, but with which, owing to the things it has in common with that world, we are able to sympathize, which we can traverse and comprehend. Every now and then the artist uses his observing faculty more, and his magnifying and (since there is no better word) distorting lens less; every now and then he reverses the proportion. Some tastes will like him best in the one stage; some in the other; the happier constituted will like him best in both. These latter will decline to put *Eugénie Grandet* above the *Peau de Chagrin,* or *Le Père Goriot* above the wonderful handful of tales which includes *La Recherche de l'Absolu* and *Le Chef-d'œuvre Inconnu,* though they will no doubt recognize that even in the two first named members of these pairs the Bal-

zacian quality, that of magnifying and rendering grandiose, is present, and that the martyrdom of Eugénie, the avarice of her father, the blind self-devotion of Goriot to his thankless and worthless children, would not be what they are if they were seen through a perfectly achromatic and normal medium.

This specially Balzacian quality is, I think, unique. It is like—it may almost be said to *be*—the poetic imagination, present in magnificent volume and degree, but in some miraculous way deprived and sterilized of the specially poetical quality. By this I do not of course mean that Balzac did not write in verse: we have a few verses of his, and they are pretty bad, but that is neither here nor there. The difference between Balzac and a great poet lies not in the fact that the one fills the whole page with printed words, and the other only a part of it—but in something else. If I could put that something else into distinct words I should therein attain the philosopher's stone, the elixir of life, the *primum mobile,* the *grand arcanum,* not merely of criticism but of all things. It might be possible to coast about it, to hint at it, by adumbrations and in consequences. But it is better and really more helpful to face the difficulty boldly, and to say that Balzac, approaching a great poet nearer perhaps than any other prose writer in any language, is distinguished from one by the absence of the very last touch, the finally constituting quiddity, which makes a great poet different from Balzac.

Now, when we make this comparison, it is of the first interest to remember—and it is one of the uses of the comparison, that it suggests the remembrance of the fact—that the great poets have usually been themselves extremely ex-

act observers of detail. It has not made them great poets; but they would not be great poets without it. And when Eugénie Grandet starts from *le petit banc de bois* at the reference to it in her scoundrelly cousin's letter (to take only one instance out of a thousand), we see in Balzac the same observation, subject to the limitation just mentioned, that we see in Dante and Shakespeare, in Chaucer and Tennyson. But the great poets do not as a rule *accumulate* detail. Balzac does, and from this very accumulation he manages to derive that singular gigantesque vagueness—differing from the poetic vague, but ranking next to it—which I have here ventured to note as his distinguishing quality. He bewilders us a very little by it, and he gives us the impression that he has slightly bewildered himself. But the compensations of the bewilderment are large.

For in this labyrinth and whirl of things, in this heat and hurry of observation and imagination, the special intoxication of Balzac consists. Every great artist has his own means of producing this intoxication, and it differs in result like the stimulus of beauty or of wine. Those persons who are unfortunate enough to see in Balzac little or nothing but an ingenious piler-up of careful strokes—a man of science taking his human documents and classing them after an orderly fashion in portfolio and deed-box—must miss this intoxication altogether. It is much more agreeable as well as much more accurate to see in the manufacture of the *Comédie* the process of a Cyclopean workshop—the bustle, the hurry, the glare and shadow, the steam and sparks of Vulcanian forging. The results, it is true, are by no means confused or disorderly—neither were those of the forges that worked under Lipari—but there certainly went much more to them

than the dainty fingering of a literary fretwork-maker or the dull rummagings of a realist *à la* Zola.

In part no doubt, and in great part, the work of Balzac is dream-stuff rather than life-stuff, and it is all the better for that. What is better than dreams? But the coherence of his visions, their bulk, their solidity, the way in which they return to us and we return to them, make them such dream-stuff as there is all too little of in this world. If it is true that evil on the whole predominates over good in the vision of this "Voyant," as Philarète Chasles so justly called him (and I think it does, though not to the same extent as I once thought), two very respectable, and in one case very large, though somewhat opposed divisions of mankind, the philosophic pessimist and the convinced and consistent Christian believer, will tell us that this is at least not one of the points in which it is unfaithful to life. If the author is closer and more faithful in his study of meanness and vice than in his studies of nobility and virtue, the blame is due at least as much to his models as to himself. If, as I fear must be confessed, he has seldom succeeded in combining a really passionate with a really noble conception of love, very few of his countrymen have been more fortunate in that respect. If in some of his types—his journalists, his married women, and others—he seems to have sacrificed to conventions, let us remember that those who know attribute to his conventions such a powerful if not altogether such a holy influence that two generations of the people he painted have actually lived more and more up to his painting of them.

And last of all, but also greatest, has to be considered the immensity of his imaginative achievement, the huge space

that he has filled for us with vivid creation, the range of amusement, of instruction, of (after a fashion) edification which he has thrown open for us all to walk in. It is possible that he himself and others more or less well-meaningly, though more or less maladroitly, following his lead, may have exaggerated the coherence and the architectural design of the *Comédie*. But it has coherence and it has design; nor shall we find anything exactly to parallel it. In mere bulk the *Comédie* probably, if not certainly, exceeds the production of any novelist of the first class in any kind of fiction except Dumas, and with Dumas, for various and well-known reasons, there is no possibility of comparing it. All others yield in bulk; all in a certain concentration and intensity; none even aims at anything like the same system and completeness. It must be remembered that owing to shortness of life, lateness of beginning, and the diversion of the author to other work, the *Comédie* is the the production, and not the sole production, of some seventeen or eighteen years at most. Not a volume of it, for all that failure to reach the completest perfection in form and style which has been acknowledged, can be accused of thinness, of scamped work, of mere repetition, of mere cobbling up. Every one bears the marks of steady and ferocious labor, as well as of the genius which had at last come where it had been so earnestly called and had never gone away again. It is possible to overpraise Balzac in parts or to mispraise him as a whole. But so long as inappropriate and superfluous comparisons are avoided and as his own excellence is recognized and appreciated, it is scarcely possible to overestimate that excellence in itself and for itself. He stands alone; even with Dickens, who is his nearest analogue, he shows far more points of dif-

ference than of likeness. His vastness of bulk is not more remarkable than his peculiarity of quality; and when these two things coincide in literature or elsewhere, then that in which they coincide may be called, and must be called, Great, without hesitation and without reserve.

GEORGE SAINTSBURY.

APPENDIX

THE form in which Balzac's works were known to the public for something like a generation after his death was classified in the following manner, the division having been, after many others, made by himself, and being that in which the work stood at the time of his death, except that the *Député d'Arcis* was not then fully published:—

COMÉDIE HUMAINE.

SCÈNES DE LA VIE PRIVÉE.

Tome 1. LA MAISON DU CHAT-QUI-PELOTE. Le Bal de Sceaux. La Bourse. La Vendetta. Mme. Firmiani. Une Double Famille.

Tome 2. LA PAIX DU MÉNAGE. La Fausse Maîtresse. Étude de femme. Autre étude de femme. La Grande Bretêche. Albert Savarus.

Tome 3. MEMOIRES DE DEUX JEUNES MARIÉES. Une Fille d'Éve.

Tome 4. LA FEMME DE TRENTE ANS. La Femme abandonnée. La Grenadière. Le Message. Gobseck.

Tome 5. LE CONTRAT DE MARIAGE. Un Début dans la vie.

Tome 6. MODESTE MIGNON.

Tome 7. BÉATRIX.

Tome 8. HONORINE. Le Colonel Chabert. La Messe de l'Athée. L'Interdiction. Pierre Grassou.

SCÈNES DE LA VIE DE PROVINCE.

Tome 9. URSULE MIROUËT.

Tome 10. EUGÉNIE GRANDET.

Tome 11. LES CÉLIBATAIRES—I. Pierrette. Le Curé de Tours.

Tome 12. LES CÉLIBATAIRES—II. Un Ménage de garçon.

Tome 13. LES PARISIENS EN PROVINCE. L'illustre Gaudissart. La Muse du département.

Tome 14. LES RIVALITÉS. La Vieille Fille. Le Cabinet des antiques.

Tome 15. LE LYS DANS LA VALLÉE.

Tome 16. ILLUSIONS PERDUES—I. Les Deux Poëtes. Un grand Homme de province à Paris, 1re partie.

Tome 17. ILLUSIONS PERDUES—II. Un grand Homme de province, 2e p. Eve et David.

SCÈNES DE LA VIE PARISIENNE.

Tome 18. SPLENDEURS ET MISÈRES DES COURTISANES. Esther heureuse. A combien l'amour revient aux vieillards. Ou mènent les mauvais chemins.

Tome 19. LA DERNIÈRE INCARNATION DE VAUTRIN. Un Prince de la Bohème. Un Homme d'affaires. Gaudissart II. Les Comédiens sans le savoir.

Tome 20. HISTOIRE DES TREIZE. Ferragus. La Duchesse de Langeais. La Fille aux yeux d'or.

Tome 21. LE PÈRE GORIOT.

Tome 22. CÉSAR BIROTTEAU.

Tome 23. LA MAISON NUCINGEN. Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan. Les Employés. Sarrasine. Facino Cane.

Tome 24. Les Parents Pauvres—I. La Cousine Bette.
Tome 25. Les Parents Pauvres—II. Le Cousin Pons.

SCÈNES DE LA VIE POLITIQUE.

Tome 26. Une Ténébreuse Affaire. Un Episode sous la Terreur.

Tome 27. L'Envers de l'Histoire Contemporaine. Madame de la Chanterie. L'Initié. Z. Marcas.

Tome 28. Le Député d'Arcis.

SCÈNES DE LA VIE MILITAIRE.

Tome 29. Les Chouans. Une Passion dans le désert.

SCÈNES DE LA VIE DE CAMPAGNE.

Tome 30. Le Médecin de Campagne.
Tome 31. Le Curé de Village.
Tome 32. Les Paysans.

ÉTUDES PHILOSOPHIQUES.

Tome 33. La Peau de Chagrin.

Tome 34. La Recherche de l'Absolu. Jésus-Christ en Flandre. Melmoth réconcilié. Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu.

Tome 35. L'Enfant Maudit. Gambara. Massimilla Doni.

Tome 36. Les Marana. Adieu. Le Réquisitionnaire. El Verdugo. Un Drame au bord de la mer. L'Auberge rouge. L'Elixir de longue vie. Maître Cornélius.

Tome 37. Sur Catherine de Médicis. Le Martyr calviniste. Le Confidence des Ruggieri. Les deux Rêves.

Tome 38. Louis Lambert. Les Proscrits. Seraphita.

ÉTUDES ANALYTIQUES.

Tome 39. PHYSIOLOGIE DU MARIAGE.
Tome 40. PETITES MISÈRES DE LA VIE CONJUGALE.

CONTES DROLATIQUES.

Tome 41. Tome 42. Tome 43.

THÉÂTRE.

Tome 44. VAUTRIN, drame. Les Ressources de Quinola, comédie.
Tome 45. LA MARATRE, drame. Le Faiseur (Mercadet), comédie.

ŒUVRES DE JEUNESSE.

Tome 46. JEAN-LOUIS.
Tome 47. L'ISRAËLITE.
Tome 48. L'HÉRITIÈRE DE BIRAGUE.
Tome 49. LE CENTENAIRE.
Tome 50. LA DERNIÈRE FÉE.
Tome 51. LE VICAIRE DES ARDENNES.
Tome 52. ARGOW LE PIRATE.
Tome 53. JANE LA PALE.
Tome 54. DOM GIGADAS.
Tome 55. L'EXCOMMUNIÉ.

It seems, however, that Balzac left, on a copy of the works, certain indications of change; and when, many years later, an *Édition Définitive* was published, this order, with a few small changes for convenience sake, was accepted. This edition added to the Comédie one considerable novel, *Les*

Petits Bourgeois (a novel, however, which, like *Le Député d'Arcis,* is said to have been finished by another hand), altered the order and titles of the tales in some cases, and sometimes varied the text a little. On the whole, however, inasmuch as Balzac never did actually issue the Works in this form, and as, with his restless spirit of change, he would have pretty certainly made further alterations, the old classification seems preferable to the new. It is rather more closely adhered to in the following translation, but not absolutely, the great variation of size in the volumes having necessitated some redistribution of the smaller tales. Nor has it been thought necessary to observe in publication the order of the works, the place of each of which in the general scheme will be immediately recognized by looking at this table.

It should, however, be noted that the *Édition Définitive* contains besides the *Petits Bourgeois* (but exclusive of the *Œuvres de Jeunesse,* which do not there appear), an exceedingly interesting volume of letters, four more of Miscellaneous Works, not perhaps of the first attraction to the general reader, but invaluable to the student; and a masterly *Histoire des Œuvres de Balzac,* by M. le Vicomte de Spœlberch de Lovenjoul, in which all the services that the bibliographer can do to a voluminous and intricate author are bestowed with a modesty, industry, erudition, and clearness not elsewhere surpassed in literature. Not much less useful is the companion volume to the library edition entitled *Répertoire de la Comédie Humaine,* by MM. Cerfberr and Christophe, in which the various appearances of the personages in the novels are reduced to a sort of biographical dictionary.

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

In giving the general title of "The Human Comedy" to a work begun nearly thirteen years since, it is necessary to explain its motive, to relate its origin, and briefly sketch its plan, while endeavoring to speak of these matters as though I had no personal interest in them. This is not so difficult as the public might imagine. Few works conduce to much vanity; much labor conduces to great diffidence. This observation accounts for the study of their own works made by Corneille, Molière, and other great writers; if it is impossible to equal them in their fine conceptions, we may try to imitate them in this feeling.

The idea of *The Human Comedy* was at first as a dream to me, one of those impossible projects which we caress and then let fly; a chimera that gives us a glimpse of its smiling woman's face, and forthwith spreads its wings and returns to a heavenly realm of phantasy. But this chimera, like many another, has become a reality; has its behests, its tyranny, which must be obeyed.

The idea originated in a comparison between Humanity and Animality.

It is a mistake to suppose that the great dispute which has lately made a stir, between Cuvier and Geoffroi Saint-Hilaire, arose from a scientific innovation. Unity of structure, under other names, had occupied the greatest minds during the two previous centuries. As we read the extraordinary writings of the mystics who studied the

sciences in their relation to infinity, such as Swedenborg, Saint-Martin, and others, and the works of the greatest authors on Natural History—Leibnitz, Buffon, Charles Bonnet, etc., we detect in the *monads* of Leibnitz, in the *organic molecules* of Buffon, in the *vegetative force* of Needham, in the correlation of similar organs of Charles Bonnet—who in 1760 was so bold as to write, "Animals vegetate as plants do"—we detect, I say, the rudiments of the great law of Self for Self, which lies at the root of *Unity of Plan.* There is but one Animal. The Creator works on a single model for every organized being. "The Animal" is elementary, and takes its external form, or, to be accurate, the differences in its form, from the environment in which it is obliged to develop. Zoölogical species are the result of these differences. The announcement and defence of this system, which is indeed in harmony with our preconceived ideas of Divine Power, will be the eternal glory of Geoffroi Saint-Hilaire, Cuvier's victorious opponent on this point of higher science, whose triumph was hailed by Goethe in the last article he wrote.

I, for my part, convinced of this scheme of nature long before the discussion to which it has given rise, perceived that in this respect society resembled nature. For does not society modify Man, according to the conditions in which he lives and acts, into men as manifold as the species in Zoölogy? The differences between a soldier, an artisan, a man of business, a lawyer, an idler, a student, a statesman, a merchant, a sailor, a poet, a beggar, a priest, are as great, though not so easy to define, as those between the wolf, the lion, the ass, the crow, the shark, the seal, the sheep, etc. Thus social species have always existed, and will always exist, just as

there are zoölogical species. If Buffon could produce a magnificent work by attempting to represent in a book the whole realm of zoölogy, was there not room for a work of the same kind on society? But the limits set by nature to the variations of animals have no existence in society. When Buffon describes the lion, he dismisses the lioness with a few phrases; but in society a wife is not always the female of the male. There may be two perfectly dissimilar beings in one household. The wife of a shopkeeper is sometimes worthy of a prince, and the wife of a prince is often worthless compared with the wife of an artisan. The social state has freaks which Nature does not allow herself; it is nature *plus* society. The description of social species would thus be at least double that of animal species, merely in view of the two sexes. Then, among animals the drama is limited; there is scarcely any confusion; they turn and rend each other—that is all. Men, too, rend each other; but their greater or less intelligence makes the struggle far more complicated. Though some savants do not yet admit that the animal nature flows into human nature through an immense tide of life, the grocer certainly becomes a peer, and the noble sometimes sinks to the lowest social grade. Again, Buffon found that life was extremely simple among animals. Animals have little property, and neither arts nor sciences; while man, by a law that has yet to be sought, has a tendency to express his culture, his thoughts, and his life in everything he appropriates to his use. Though Leuwenhoek, Swammerdam, Spallanzani, Réaumur, Charles Bonnet, Müller, Haller and other patient investigators have shown us how interesting are the habits of animals, those of each kind are, at least to our eyes, always and in every age alike; whereas the dress,

the manners, the speech, the dwelling of a prince, a banker, an artist, a citizen, a priest, and a pauper are absolutely unlike, and change with every phase of civilization.

Hence the work to be written needed a threefold form—men, women, and things; that is to say, persons and the material expression of their minds; man, in short, and life.

As we read the dry and discouraging list of events called History, who can have failed to note that the writers of all periods, in Egypt, Persia, Greece, and Rome, have forgotten to give us the history of manners? The fragment of Petronius on the private life of the Romans excites rather than satisfies our curiosity. It was from observing this great void in the field of history that the Abbé Barthélemy devoted his life to a reconstruction of Greek manners in *Le Jeune Anacharsis.*

But how could such a drama, with the four or five thousand persons which a society offers, be made interesting? How, at the same time, please the poet, the philosopher, and the masses who want both poetry and philosophy under striking imagery? Though I could conceive of the importance and of the poetry of such a history of the human heart, I saw no way of writing it; for hitherto the most famous story-tellers had spent their talent in creating two or three typical actors, in depicting one aspect of life. It was with this idea that I read the works of Walter Scott. Walter Scott, the modern troubadour, or finder (*trouvère=trouveur*), had just then given an aspect of grandeur to a class of composition unjustly regarded as of the second rank. Is it not really more difficult to compete with personal and parochial interests by writing of Daphnis and Chloe, Roland, Amadis, Panurge, Don Quixote, Manon Lescaut, Clarissa, Lovelace,

Robinson Crusoe, Gil Blas, Ossian, Julie d'Etanges, My Uncle Toby, Werther, Corinne, Adolphe, Paul and Virginia, Jeanie Deans, Claverhouse, Ivanhoe, Manfred, Mignon, than to set forth in order facts more or less similar in every country, to investigate the spirit of laws that have fallen into desuetude, to review the theories which mislead nations, or, like some metaphysicians, to explain what *Is?* In the first place, these actors, whose existence becomes more prolonged and more authentic than that of the generations which saw their birth, almost always live solely on condition of their being a vast reflection of the present. Conceived in the womb of their own period, the whole heart of humanity stirs within their frame, which often covers a complete system of philosophy. Thus Walter Scott raised to the dignity of the philosophy of History the literature which, from age to age, sets perennial gems in the poetic crown of every nation where letters are cultivated. He vivified it with the spirit of the past; he combined drama, dialogue, portrait, scenery, and description; he fused the marvelous with truth—the two elements of the times; and he brought poetry into close contact with the familiarity of the humblest speech. But as he had not so much devised a system as hit upon a manner in the ardor of his work, or as its logical outcome, he never thought of connecting his compositions in such a way as to form a complete history of which each chapter was a novel, and each novel the picture of a period.

It was by discerning this lack of unity, which in no way detracts from the Scottish writer's greatness, that I perceived at once the scheme which would favor the execution of my purpose, and the possibility of executing it. Though dazzled, so to speak, by Walter Scott's amazing fertility, always him-

self and always original, I did not despair, for I found the source of his genius in the infinite variety of human nature. Chance is the greatest romancer in the world; we have only to study it. French society would be the real author; I should only be the secretary. By drawing up an inventory of vices and virtues, by collecting the chief facts of the passions, by depicting characters, by choosing the principal incidents of social life, by composing types out of a combination of homogeneous characteristics, I might perhaps succeed in writing the history which so many historians have neglected: that of Manners. By patience and persevenance I might produce for France in the nineteenth century the book which we must all regret that Rome, Athens, Tyre, Memphis, Persia, and India have not bequeathed to us; that history of their social life which, prompted by the Abbé Barthélemy, Monteil patiently and steadily tried to write for the Middle Ages, but in an unattractive form.

The work, so far, was nothing. By adhering to the strict lines of a reproduction a writer might be a more or less faithful, and more or less successful painter of types of humanity, a narrator of the dramas of private life, an archæologist of social furniture, a cataloguer of professions, a registrar of good and evil; but to deserve the praise of which every artist must be ambitious, must I not also investigate the reasons or the cause of these social effects, detect the hidden sense of this vast assembly of figures, passions, and incidents? And finally, having sought—I will not say having found—this reason, this motive power, must I not reflect on first principles, and discover in what particulars societies approach or deviate from the eternal law of truth and beauty? In spite of the wide scope of the pre-

liminaries, which might of themselves constitute a book, the work, to be complete, would need a conclusion. Thus depicted, society ought to bear in itself the reason of its working.

The law of the writer, in virtue of which he is a writer, and which I do not hesitate to say makes him the equal, or perhaps the superior, of the statesman, is his judgment, whatever it may be, on human affairs, and his absolute devotion to certain principles. Machiavelli, Hobbes, Bossuet, Leibnitz, Kant, Montesquieu *are* the science which statesmen apply. "A writer ought to have settled opinions on morals and politics; he should regard himself as a tutor of men; for men need no masters to teach them to doubt," says Bonald. I took these noble words as my guide long ago; they are the written law of the monarchical writer. And those who would confute me by my own words will find that they have misinterpreted some ironical phrase, or that they have turned against me a speech given to one of my actors—a trick peculiar to calumniators.

As to the intimate purpose, the soul of this work, these are the principles on which it is based.

Man is neither good nor bad; he is born with instincts and capabilities; society, far from depraving him, as Rousseau asserts, improves him, makes him better; but self-interest also develops his evil tendencies. Christianity, above all, Catholicism, being—as I have pointed out in the Country Doctor (*le Médecin de Campagne*)—a complete system for the repression of the depraved tendencies of man, is the most powerful element of social order.

In reading attentively the presentment of society cast, as it were, from the life, with all that is good and all that

is bad in it, we learn this lesson—if thought, or if passion, which combines thought and feeling, is the vital social element, it is also its destructive element. In this respect social life is like the life of man. Nations live long only by moderating their vital energy. Teaching, or rather education, by religious bodies is the grand principle of life for nations, the only means of diminishing the sum of evil and increasing the sum of good in all society. Thought, the living principle of good and ill, can only be trained, quelled, and guided by religion. The only possible religion is Christianity (see the letter from Paris in "Louis Lambert," in which the young mystic explains, à propos to Swedenborg's doctrines, how there has never been but one religion since the world began). Christianity created modern nationalities, and it will preserve them. Hence, no doubt, the necessity for the monarchical principle. Catholicism and Royalty are twin principles.

As to the limits within which these two principles should be confined by various institutions, so that they may not become absolute, every one will feel that a brief preface ought not to be a political treatise. I cannot, therefore, enter on religious discussions, nor on the political discussions of the day. I write under the light of two eternal truths—Religion and Monarchy; two necessities, as they are shown to be by contemporary events, towards which every writer of sound sense ought to try to guide the country back. Without being an enemy to election, which is an excellent principle as a basis of legislation, I reject election regarded as *the only social instrument,* especially so badly organized as it now is (1842); for it fails to represent imposing minorities, whose ideas and interests would occupy the attention of a mon-

archical government. Elective power extended to all gives us government by the masses, the only irresponsible form of government, under which tyranny is unlimited, for it calls itself law. Besides, I regard the family and not the individual as the true social unit. In this respect, at the risk of being thought retrograde, I side with Bossuet and Bonald instead of going with modern innovators. Since election has become the only social instrument, if I myself were to exercise it no contradiction between my acts and my words should be inferred. An engineer points out that a bridge is about to fall, that it is dangerous for any one to cross it; but he crosses it himself when it is the only road to the town. Napoleon adapted election to the spirit of the French nation with wonderful skill. The least important members of his Legislative Body became the most famous orators of the Chamber after the Restoration. No Chamber has ever been the equal of the *Corps Législatif,* comparing them man for man. The elective system of the Empire was, then, indisputably the best.

Some persons may, perhaps, think that this declaration is somewhat autocratic and self-assertive. They will quarrel with the novelist for wanting to be an historian, and will call him to account for writing politics. I am simply fulfilling an obligation—that is my reply. The work I have undertaken will be as long as a history; I was compelled to explain the logic of it, hitherto unrevealed, and its principles and moral purpose.

Having been obliged to withdraw the prefaces formerly published, in response to essentially ephemeral criticisms, I will retain only one remark.

Writers who have a purpose in view, were it only a re-

version to principles familiar in the past because they are eternal, should always clear the ground. Now every one who, in the domain of ideas, brings his stone by pointing out an abuse, or setting a mark on some evil that it may be removed—every such man is stigmatized as immoral. The accusation of immorality, which has never failed to be cast at the courageous writer, is, after all, the last that can be brought when nothing else remains to be said to a romancer. If you are truthful in your pictures; if by dint of daily and nightly toil you succeed in writing the most difficult language in the world, the word *immoral* is flung in your teeth. Socrates was immoral; Jesus Christ was immoral; they both were persecuted in the name of the society they overset or reformed. When a man is to be killed he is taxed with immorality. These tactics, familiar in party warfare, are a disgrace to those who use them. Luther and Calvin knew well what they were about when they shielded themselves behind damaged worldly interests! And they lived all the days of their life.

When depicting all society, sketching it in the immensity of its turmoil, it happened—it could not but happen—that the picture displayed more of evil than of good; that some part of the fresco represented a guilty couple; and the critics at once raised the cry of immorality, without pointing out the morality of another portion intended to be a perfect contrast. As the critic knew nothing of the general plan I could forgive him, all the more because one can no more hinder criticism than the use of eyes, tongues, and judgment. Also the time for an impartial verdict is not yet come for me. And, after all, the author who cannot make up his mind to face the fire of criticism should no more think of

writing than a traveler should start on his journey counting on a perpetually clear sky. On this point it remains to be said that the most conscientious moralists doubt greatly whether society can show as many good actions as bad ones; and in the picture I have painted of it there are more virtuous figures than reprehensible ones. Blameworthy actions, faults and crimes, from the lightest to the most atrocious, always meet with punishment, human or divine, signal or secret. I have done better than the historian, for I am free. Cromwell here on earth escaped all punishment but that inflicted by thoughtful men. And on this point there have been divided schools. Bossuet even showed some consideration for the great regicide. William of Orange, the usurper, Hugues Capet, another usurper, lived to old age with no more qualms or fears than Henri IV. or Charles I. The lives of Catherine II. and of Frederic of Prussia would be conclusive against any kind of moral law, if they were judged by the twofold aspect of the morality which guides ordinary mortals, and that which is in use by crowned heads; for, as Napoleon said, for kings and statesmen there are the lesser and the higher morality. My scenes of political life are founded on this profound observation. It is not a law to history, as it is to romance, to make for a beautiful ideal. History is, or ought to be, what it was; while romance ought to be "the better world," as was said by Mme. Necker, one of the most distinguished thinkers of the last century.

Still, with this noble falsity, romance would be nothing if it were not true in detail. Walter Scott, obliged as he was to conform to the ideas of an essentially hypocritical nation, was false to humanity in his picture of woman, because his models were schismatics. The protestant woman

has no ideal. She may be chaste, pure, virtuous; but her unexpansive love will always be as calm and methodical as the fulfilment of a duty. It might seem as though the Virgin Mary had chilled the hearts of those sophists who have banished her from heaven with her treasures of loving-kindness. In Protestantism there is no possible future for the woman who has sinned; while, in the Catholic Church, the hope of forgiveness makes her sublime. Hence, for the protestant writer there is but one Woman, while the Catholic writer finds a new woman in each new situation. If Walter Scott had been a Catholic, if he had set himself the task of describing truly the various phases of society which have successively existed in Scotland, perhaps the painter of Effie and Alice—the two figures for which he blamed himself in his later years—might have admitted passion with its sins and punishments, and the virtues revealed by repentance. Passion is the sum-total of humanity. Without passion, religion, history, romance, art, would all be useless.

Some persons, seeing me collect such a mass of facts and paint them as they are, with passion for their motive power, have supposed, but wrongly, that I must belong to the school of Sensualism and Materialism—two aspects of the same thing—Pantheism. But their misapprehension was perhaps justified—or inevitable. I do not share the belief in indefinite progress for society as a whole; I believe in man's improvement in himself. Those who insist on reading in me the intention to consider man as a finished creation are strangely mistaken. *Séraphita,* the doctrine in action of the Christian Buddha, seems to me an ample answer to this rather heedless accusation.

In certain fragments of this long work I have tried to

popularize the amazing facts, I may say the marvels of electricity, which in man is metamorphosed into an incalculable force; but in what way do the phenomena of brain and nerves, which prove the existence of an undiscovered world of psychology, modify the necessary and undoubted relations of the worlds to God? In what way can they shake the Catholic dogma? Though irrefutable facts should some day place thought in the class of fluids which are discerned only by their effects while their substance evades our senses, even when aided by so many mechanical means, the result will be the same as when Christopher Columbus detected that the earth is a sphere, and Galileo demonstrated its rotation. Our future will be unchanged. The wonders of animal magnetism, with which I have been familiar since 1820; the beautiful experiments of Gall, Lavater's successor; all the men who have studied mind as opticians have studied light—two not dissimilar things—point to a conclusion in favor of the mystics, the disciples of St. John, and of those great thinkers who have established the spiritual world—the sphere in which are revealed the relations of God and man.

A sure grasp of the purport of this work will make it clear that I attach to common, daily facts, hidden or patent to the eye, to the acts of individual lives, and to their causes and principles, the importance which historians have hitherto ascribed to the events of public national life. The unknown struggle which goes on in a valley of the Indre between Mme. de Mortsauf and her passion is perhaps as great as the most famous of battles (*Le Lys dans la Vallée*). In one the glory of the victor is at stake; in the other it is heaven. The misfortunes of the two Birotteaus, the priest and the perfumer, to me are those of mankind. La Fosseuse

(*Médecin de Campagne*) and Mme. Graslin (*Curé de Village*) are almost the sum-total of woman. We all suffer thus every day. I have had to do a hundred times what Richardson did but once. Lovelace has a thousand forms, for social corruption takes the hues of the medium in which it lives. Clarissa, on the contrary, the lovely image of impassioned virtue, is drawn in lines of distracting purity. To create a variety of Virgins it needs a Raphael. In this respect, perhaps literature must yield to painting.

Still, I may be allowed to point out how many irreproachable figures—as regards their virtue—are to be found in the portions of this work already published: Pierrette Lorrain, Ursule Mirouët, Constance Birotteau, La Fosseuse, Eugénie Grandet, Marguerite Claës, Pauline de Villenoix, Madame Jules, Madame de la Chanterie, Eve Chardon, Mademoiselle d'Esgrignon, Madame Firmiani, Agathe Rouget, Renée de Maucombe; besides several figures in the middle-distance, who, though less conspicuous than these, nevertheless, offer the reader an example of domestic virtue; Joseph Lebas, Genestas, Benassis, Bonnet the curé, Minoret the doctor, Pillerault, David Séchard, the two Birotteaus, Chaperon the priest, Judge Popinot, Bourgeat, the Sauviats, the Tascherons, and many more. Do not all these solve the difficult literary problem which consists in making a virtuous person interesting?

It was no small task to depict the two or three thousand conspicuous types of a period; for this is, in fact, the number presented to us by each generation, and which the Human Comedy will require. This crowd of actors, of characters, this multitude of lives, needed a setting—if I may be pardoned the expression, a gallery. Hence the very natural divi-

sion, as already known, into Scenes of Private Life, of Provincial Life, of Parisian, Political, Military, and Country Life. Under these six heads are classified all the studies of manners which form the history of society at large, of all its *faits et gestes,* as our ancestors would have said. These six classes correspond, indeed, to familiar conceptions. Each has its own sense and meaning, and answers to an epoch in the life of man. I may repeat here, but very briefly, what was written by Felix Davin—a young genius snatched from literature by an early death. After being informed of my plan, he said that the Scenes of Private Life represented childhood and youth and their errors, as the Scenes of Provincial Life represented the age of passion, scheming, self-interest, and ambition. Then the Scenes of Parisian Life give a picture of the tastes and vice and unbridled powers which conduce to the habits peculiar to great cities, where the extremes of good and evil meet. Each of these divisions has its local color—Paris and the Provinces—a great social antithesis which held for me immense resources.

And not man alone, but the principal events of life, fall into classes by types. There are situations which occur in every life, typical phases, and this is one of the details I most sought after. I have tried to give an idea of the different districts of our fine country. My work has its geography, as it has its genealogy and its families, its places and things, its persons and their deeds; as it has its heraldry, its nobles and commonalty, its artisans and peasants, its politicians and dandies, its army—in short, a whole world of its own.

After describing social life in these three portions, I had to delineate certain exceptional lives, which comprehend the interests of many people, or of everybody, and are in

a degree outside the general law. Hence we have Scenes of Political Life. This vast picture of society being finished and complete, was it not needful to display it in its most violent phase, beside itself, as it were, either in self-defence or for the sake of conquest? Hence the Scenes of Military Life, as yet the most incomplete portion of my work, but for which room will be allowed in this edition, that it may form part of it when done. Finally, the Scenes of Country Life are, in a way, the evening of this long day, if I may so call the social drama. In that part are to be found the purest natures, and the application of the great principles of order, politics, and morality.

Such is the foundation, full of actors, full of comedies and tragedies, on which are raised the Philosophical Studies —the second part of my work, in which the social instrument of all these effects is displayed, and the ravages of the mind are painted, feeling after feeling; the first of this series, *The Magic Skin,* to some extent forms a link between the Philosophical Studies and Studies of Manners, by a work of almost Oriental fancy, in which life itself is shown in a mortal struggle with the very element of all passion.

Besides these, there will be a series of Analytical Studies, of which I will say nothing, for one only is published as yet —The Physiology of Marriage.

In the course of time I purpose writing two more works of this class. First, the Pathology of Social Life, then an Anatomy of Educational Bodies, and a Monograph on Virtue.

In looking forward to what remains to be done, my readers will perhaps echo what my publishers say, "Please God to spare you!" I only ask to be less tormented by men and things than I have hitherto been since I began this terrific

labor. I have had this in my favor, and I thank God for it, that the talents of the time, the finest characters and the truest friends, as noble in their private lives as the former are in public life, have wrung my hand and said, Courage!

And why should I not confess that this friendship, and the testimony here and there of persons unknown to me, have upheld me in my career, both against myself and against unjust attacks; against the calumny which has often persecuted me, against discouragement, and against the too eager hopefulness whose utterances are misinterpreted as those of overweening conceit? I had resolved to display stolid stoicism in the face of abuse and insults; but on two occasions base slanders have necessitated a reply. Though the advocates of forgiveness of injuries may regret that I should have displayed my skill in literary fence, there are many Christians who are of opinion that we live in times when it is as well to show sometimes that silence springs from generosity.

The vastness of a plan which includes both a history and a criticism of society, an analysis of its evils, and a discussion of its principles, authorizes me, I think, in giving to my work the title under which it now appears—*The Human Comedy*. Is this too ambitious? Is it not exact? That, when it is complete, the public must pronounce.

PARIS, *July* 1842.

INTRODUCTION

THE *Peau de Chagrin* is the one book of Balzac's which it is difficult for those who know it to approach without a somewhat uncritical enthusiasm. It is not faultless; no book of his is, and this cannot challenge the epithet, even to the extent to which not a few others can challenge it. It is earlier than almost any of the mature novels, except the *Chouans;* and it bears in some respects the marks of its earliness as well as, in others, those of that rather artificial scheme of representing life, which was so strongly characteristic of the author, and which, while it helped him in conceiving the *Comédie Humaine,* imposed a certain restraint and hamper on the Comédie itself. We could spare a good deal of the journalist and other talk at the orgy; and more persons than Émile have gone to sleep over, or have escaped sleep only by skipping, the unconscionable length of Raphael's story.

But these are the merest and most miserable of details. In the first place, the conception is of the very finest. You may call it an *étude philosophique,* or you may not; you may class it as an "allegory" on the banks of the Nile or the Seine, or any other river, if you like. Neither title will do it any harm, and neither can explain it or exalt it higher. The Law of Nemesis—the law that every extraordinary expansion or satisfaction of heart or brain or will is paid for—paid for inevitably, incommutably, without the possibility

of putting off or transferring the payment—is one of the truths about which no human being with a soul a little above the brute has the slightest doubt. It may be put religiously as, "Know that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment;" or philosophically, as in the same book, "All things are double, one against the other;" or in any other fashion or language. But it is an eternal and immutable verity, and the soul of man bears witness to it.

It is Balzac's way to provide abundant, and not always economically arranged backgrounds and contrasts for his central pictures; and the gaming-house (the model of how many gaming-houses since?), the gorgeous *capharnaum* of the curiosity shop, and the "orgy" provide these in the present case lavishly enough. The orgy is undoubtedly the weakest. It is only touched with others by the pleasant and good-humored skit of Gautier in *Les Jeune-France;* but the note there struck is, as usual with "Théo," the right one. You cannot "organize" an orgy; the thing comes naturally or not at all; and in the splendors of Taillefer, as in those of Trimalchio, there is a certain coldness.

But this is soon forgotten in the absorbing interest of the Skin and its master. The only adverse comment which has ever occurred to me is, that one might perhaps have expected a longer period of *insouciance,* of more or less reckless enjoyment of the privileges, to elapse before a vivid consciousness of the curse and of the penalty. I know no answer, unless it be that Balzac took the orgy itself to be, as it were, the wild oats of Raphael's period—in which case he had not much to show for it. But when the actual consciousness wakes, when the Skin has been measured on the napkin, and its shrinking noted, nothing is questionable any longer. The

frenzied anxiety of the victim is not overdone; the way in which his very frenzy leads him to make greater and even greater drafts on his capital of power without any corresponding satisfaction is masterly. And the close is more masterly still. To some tastes the actual conclusion may be a thought too allegorical, but in *mil-huit-cent-trente* your allegory was your only wear; and Gautier, in the pleasant book above cited, was thoroughly in the fashion when he audaciously put a hidden literary meaning on the merry tale of "Celle-ci et celle-là." Here, too, if anywhere, the opposition of Pauline and Fœdora in this way is justified. It softens off the too high-strung tragedy of the catastrophe at the same time that it points the moral, and it rounds as much as it adorns the tale.

It has been observed, in no carping or hypercritical spirit, that passages of the book are somewhat high-flown in style. The fact is that Balzac had rather a tendency to this style, and only outgrew it, if he ever did outgrow it, by dint of its greater and greater unfitness for his chosen subjects. Here, if anywhere, it was excusable, just as here, if anywhere, the gigantic element in his genius found scope and play. There had been some "inventories" in literature before, and there have been many more since the description of the curiosity shop; but none, if we except the brief Shakespearian perfection of that in Clarence's dream, and none at all in a heaped and minute style, can approach this. The thing is nightmarish—you *see* the *magots* and the armor, the pictures and the statues, and amongst them all the sinister "piece of shagreen," with the ineffaceable letters stamped on it.

And so over all the book there is the note of the *voyant,* of the seer who sees and who makes others see. This note

is seldom an idyllic or merely pleasant one; the writer who has it must have, even in such a book as the *Médecin de Campagne,* a black thread in his twist, a sombre background to his happy valley. Here the subject not only excuses, but demands a constant sombreness, a tone of thunder in the air, of eclipse and earthquake. And the tone is given. A very miserable person would he be who endeavored to pick out burlesque points in the *Peau de Chagrin,* the most apocalyptic of the novels of the nineteenth century, and yet one of the most soberly true in general theme and theory. When one thinks of the tireless efforts which have been made, especially of late years, to "pejorate" pessimism and blacken gloom, and of the too general conclusion of yawn or laugh to which they bring us, it is doubly curious to come back to this sermon by a very unpriestly preacher on the simple text, "Whom the gods curse, to him they grant the desires of his heart."

Two other tales are here included. *Jésus-Christ en Flandre* is good, and *Melmoth réconcilié,* inferior in itself, has a special and adventitious interest. Maturin, whose most famous book (quite recently reprinted after long forgetfulness, but one of European interest in its time, and of special influence on Balzac) can hardly be said to receive here a continuation which is exactly *en suite,* and the odd thing is that nothing was further from Balzac's mind than to parody his original. The thing, therefore, is a curious example of the difference of point of view, of the way in which an English conception travesties itself when it gets into French hands. Maturin was an infinitely smaller man than Shakespeare, and Balzac was an infinitely greater man than Ducis; but "equals aquals" as they say, or used to say, in Maturin's country. I do not

know that Maturin fared much better at the hands of Balzac than Shakespeare has fared at the hands of Ducis and a long succession of adapters down to the present day in France.

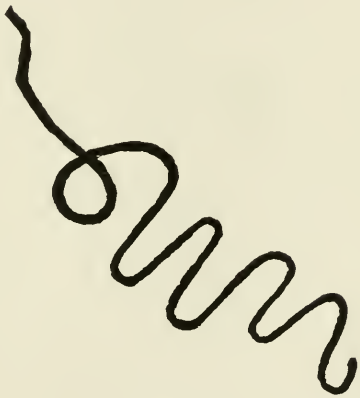
La Peau de Chagrin appeared first in August 1831, published in two volumes, by Gosselin and Canel, with a Preface and a *"Moralité,"* which the author afterwards cut out. Of its four chapters or divisions the first originally bore the title of the whole book, and the last that of "Conclusion," not "Epilogue," which was afterwards affixed to it. One or two fragments, not incorporated in the finished book, exist, having been previously published. Balzac reviewed it himself, more than once, in the *Caricature* and elsewhere, both at its first appearance and afterwards, when it reappeared in the same year with other stories and a new Preface by Philarète Chasles as *Romans et Contes Philosophiques.* This was republished more than once till, in 1835, it took rank anew in the *Études Philosophiques,* while ten years later, under the same sub-title, it was finally classed in the first complete arrangement of the *Comédie Humaine.*

Of those here added, *Jésus-Christ en Flandre* was one of the *Romans et Contes Philosophiques,* which Gosselin published in 1831, and remained as such till the constitution of the Comédie. It is a sort of Aaron's rod among Balzac's stories, and swallowed up a minor one called *L'Église. Melmoth réconcilié,* dating from 1835, first appeared in a miscellany, *Le Livre des Contes;* then it was an *Étude Philosophique;* and in 1845 it received its class in the *Comédie.*

G. S.

THE MAGIC SKIN

To Monsieur Savary, Member of Le Académie des Sciences.



STERNE—Tristram Shandy, ch. cccxxii.

I

THE TALISMAN

TOWARDS the end of the month of October 1829 a young man entered the Palais-Royal just as the gaming-houses opened, agreeably to the law which protects a passion by its very nature easily excisable. He mounted the staircase of one of the gambling hells distinguished by the number 36, without too much deliberation.

"Your hat, sir, if you please?" a thin, querulous voice called out. A little old man, crouching in the darkness behind a railing, suddenly rose and exhibited his features, carved after a mean design.

As you enter a gaming-house the law despoils you of your hat at the outset. Is it by way of a parable, a divine revelation? Or by exacting some pledge or other, is not an infernal compact implied? Is it done to compel you to preserve a respectful demeanor towards those who are about to gain money of you? Or must the detective, who squats in our social sewers, know the name of your hatter, or your own, if you happen to have written it on the lining inside? Or, after all, is the measurement of your skull required for the compilation of statistics as to the cerebral capacity of gamblers? The executive is absolutely silent on this point. But be sure of this, that though you have scarcely taken a step towards the tables, your hat no more belongs to you now than you belong to yourself. Play possesses you, your fortune, your cap, your cane, your cloak.

As you go out, it will be made clear to you, by a savage irony, that Play has yet spared you something, since your property is returned. For all that, if you bring a new hat with you, you will have to pay for the knowledge that a special costume is needed for a gambler.

The evident astonishment with which the young man took a numbered tally in exchange for his hat, which was fortunately somewhat rubbed at the brim, showed clearly enough that his mind was yet untainted; and the little old man, who had wallowed from his youth up in the furious pleasures of a gambler's life, cast a dull, indifferent glance over him, in which a philosopher might have seen wretchedness lying in the hospital, the vagrant lives of ruined folk, inquests on numberless suicides, life-long penal servitude and transportations to Guazacoalco.

His pallid, lengthy visage appeared like a haggard embodiment of the passion reduced to its simplest terms. There were traces of past anguish in its wrinkles. He supported

life on the glutinous soups at Darcet's, and gambled away his meagre earnings day by day. Like some old hackney which takes no heed of the strokes of the whip, nothing could move him now. The stifled groans of ruined players, as they passed out, their mute imprecations, their stupefied faces, found him impassive. He was the spirit of Play incarnate. If the young man had noticed this sorry Cerberus, perhaps he would have said, "There is only a pack of cards in that heart of his."

The stranger did not heed this warning writ in flesh and blood, put there, no doubt, by Providence, who has set loathing on the threshold of all evil haunts. He walked boldly into the saloon, where the rattle of coin brought his senses under the dazzling spell of an agony of greed. Most likely he had been drawn thither by that most convincing of Jean Jacques' eloquent periods, which expresses, I think, this melancholy thought, "Yes, I can imagine that a man may take to gambling when he sees only his last shilling between him and death."

There is an illusion about a gambling saloon at night as vulgar as that of a bloodthirsty drama, and just as effective. The rooms are filled with players and onlookers, with poverty-stricken age, which drags itself thither in search of stimulation, with excited faces, and revels that began in wine, to end shortly in the Seine. The passion is there in full measure, but the great number of the actors prevents you from seeing the gambling-demon face to face. The evening is a harmony or chorus in which all take part, to which each instrument in the orchestra contributes his share. You would see there plenty of respectable people who have come in search of diversion, for which they pay as they pay for the pleasures of the theatre, or of gluttony, or they come hither as to some garret where they cheapen poignant regrets for three months to come.

Do you understand all the force and frenzy in a soul which impatiently waits for the opening of a gambling hell? Between the daylight gambler and the player at night there is

the same difference that lies between a careless husband and the lover swooning under his lady's window. Only with morning comes the real throb of the passion and the craving in its stark horror. Then you can admire the real gambler, who has neither eaten, slept, thought, nor lived, he has so smarted under the scourge of his martingale, so suffered on the rack of his desire for a coup of *trente-et-quarante.* At that accursed hour you encounter eyes whose calmness terrifies you, faces that fascinate, glances that seem as if they had power to turn the cards over and consume them. The grandest hours of a gambling saloon are not the opening ones. If Spain has bull-fights, and Rome once had her gladiators, Paris waxes proud of her Palais-Royal, where the inevitable *roulettes* cause blood to flow in streams, and the public can have the pleasure of watching without fear of their feet slipping in it.

Take a quiet peep at the arena. How bare it looks! The paper on the walls is greasy to the height of your head, there is nothing to bring one reviving thought. There is not so much as a nail for the convenience of suicides. The floor is worn and dirty. An oblong table stands in the middle of the room, the tablecloth is worn by the friction of gold, but the straw-bottomed chairs about it indicate an odd indifference to luxury in the men who will lose their lives here in the quest of the fortune that is to put luxury within their reach.

This contradiction in humanity is seen wherever the soul reacts powerfully upon itself. The gallant would clothe his mistress in silks, would deck her out in soft Eastern fabrics, though he and she must lie on a truckle-bed. The ambitious dreamer sees himself at the summit of power, while he slavishly prostrates himself in the mire. The tradesman stagnates in his damp, unhealthy shop, while he builds a great mansion for his son to inherit prematurely, only to be ejected from it by law proceedings at his own brother's instance.

After all, is there a less pleasing thing in the world than

a house of pleasure? Singular question! Man is always at strife with himself. His present woes give the lie to his hopes; yet he looks to a future which is not his, to indemnify him for these present sufferings; setting upon all his actions the seal of inconsequence and of the weakness of his nature. We have nothing here below in full measure but misfortune.

There were several gamblers in the room already when the young man entered. Three bald-headed seniors were lounging round the green table. Imperturbable as diplomatists, those plaster-cast faces of theirs betokened blunted sensibilities, and hearts which had long forgotten how to throb, even when a woman's dowry was the stake. A young Italian, olive-hued and dark-haired, sat at one end, with his elbows on the table, seeming to listen to the presentiments of luck that dictate a gambler's "Yes" or "No." The glow of fire and gold was on that southern face. Some seven or eight onlookers stood, by way of an audience, awaiting a drama composed of the strokes of chance, the faces of the actors, the circulation of coin, and the motion of the croupier's rake, much as a silent, motionless crowd watches the headsman in the Place de Grève. A tall, thin man, in a threadbare coat, held a card in one hand, and a pin in the other, to mark the numbers of Red or Black. He seemed a modern Tantalus, with all the pleasures of his epoch at his lips, a hoardless miser drawing in imaginary gains, a sane species of lunatic who consoles himself in his misery by chimerical dreams, a man who touches peril and vice as a young priest handles the unconsecrated wafer in the white mass.

One or two experts at the game, shrewd speculators, had placed themselves opposite the bank, like old convicts who have lost all fear of the hulks; they meant to try two or three coups, and then to depart at once with the expected gains, on which they lived. Two elderly waiters dawdled about with their arms folded, looking from time to time into the garden from the windows, as if to show their insignificant faces as a sign to passers-by.

The croupier and banker threw a ghastly and withering glance at the punters, and cried, in a sharp voice, "Make your game!" as the young man came in. The silence seemed to grow deeper as all heads turned curiously towards the new arrival. Who would have thought it? The jaded elders, the fossilized waiters, the onlookers, the fanatical Italian himself, felt an indefinable dread at sight of the stranger. Is he not wretched indeed who can excite pity here? Must he not be very helpless to receive sympathy, ghastly in appearance to raise a shudder in these places, where pain utters no cry, where wretchedness looks gay, and despair is decorous? Such thoughts as these produced a new emotion in these torpid hearts as the young man entered. Were not executioners known to shed tears over the fair-haired, girlish heads that had to fall at the bidding of the Revolution?

The gamblers saw at a glance a dreadful mystery in the novice's face. His young features were stamped with a melancholy grace, his looks told of unsuccess and many blighted hopes. The dull apathy of the suicide had made his forehead so deadly pale, a bitter smile carved faint lines about the corners of his mouth, and there was an abandonment about him that was painful to see. Some sort of demon sparkled in the depths of his eye, which drooped, wearied perhaps with pleasure. Could it have been dissipation that had set its foul mark on the proud face, once pure and bright, and now brought low? Any doctor seeing the yellow circles about his eyelids, and the color in his cheeks, would have set them down to some affection of the heart or lungs, while poets would have attributed them to the havoc brought by the search for knowledge and to night-vigils by the student's lamp.

But a complaint more fatal than any disease, a disease more merciless than genius or study, had drawn this young face, and had wrung a heart which dissipation, study, and sickness had scarcely disturbed. When a notorious criminal is taken to the convict's prison, the prisoners welcome him respectfully, and these evil spirits in human shape, experienced in torments,

bowed before an unheard-of anguish. By the depth of the wound which met their eyes, they recognized a prince among them, by the majesty of his unspoken irony, by the refined wretchedness of his garb. The frock-coat that he wore was well cut, but his cravat was on terms so intimate with his waistcoat that no one could suspect him of underlinen. His hands, shapely as a woman's, were not perfectly clean; for two day past indeed he had ceased to wear gloves. If the very croupier and the waiters shuddered, it was because some traces of the spell of innocence yet hung about his meagre, delicately-shaped form, and his scanty fair hair in its natural curls.

He looked only about twenty-five years of age, and any trace of vice in his face seemed to be there by accident. A young constitution still resisted the inroads of lubricity. Darkness and light, annihilation and existence, seemed to struggle in him, with effects of mingled beauty and terror. There he stood like some erring angel that has lost his radiance; and these emeritus-professors of vice and shame were ready to bid the novice depart, even as some toothless crone might be seized with pity for a beautiful girl who offers herself up to infamy.

The young man went straight up to the table, and, as he stood there, flung down a piece of gold which he held in his hand, without deliberation. It rolled on to the Black; then, as strong natures can, he looked calmly, if anxiously, at the croupier, as if he held useless subterfuges in scorn.

The interest this coup awakened was so great that the old gamesters laid nothing upon it; only the Italian, inspired by a gambler's enthusiasm, smiled suddenly at some thought, and punted his heap of coin against the stranger's stake.

The banker forgot to pronounce the phrases that use and wont have reduced to an inarticulate cry—"Make your game. . . . The game is made. . . . Bets are closed." The croupier spread out the cards, and seemed to wish luck to the newcomer, indifferent as he was to the losses or gains of those who took part in these sombre pleasures. Every by-

stander thought he saw a drama, the closing scene of a noble life, in the fortunes of that bit of gold; and eagerly fixed his eyes on the prophetic cards; but however closely they watched the young man, they could discover not the least sign of feeling on his cool but restless face.

"Even! red wins," said the croupier officially. A dumb sort of rattle came from the Italian's throat when he saw the folded notes that the banker showered upon him, one after another. The young man only understood his calamity when the croupier's rake was extended to sweep away his last napoleon. The ivory touched the coin with a little click, as it swept it with the speed of an arrow into the heap of gold before the bank. The stranger turned pale at the lips, and softly shut his eyes, but he unclosed them again at once, and the red color returned as he affected the airs of an Englishman, to whom life can offer no new sensation, and disappeared without the glance full of entreaty for compassion that a desperate gamester will often give the bystanders. How much can happen in a second's space; how many things depend on a throw of the die!

"That was his last cartridge, of course," said the croupier, smiling after a moment's silence, during which he picked up the coin between his finger and thumb and held it up.

"He is a cracked brain that will go and drown himself," said a frequenter of the place. He looked round about at the other players, who all knew each other.

"Bah!" said a waiter, as he took a pinch of snuff.

"If we had but followed *his* example," said an old gamester to the others, as he pointed out the Italian.

Everybody looked at the lucky player, whose hands shook as he counted his bank-notes.

"A voice seemed to whisper to me," he said. "The luck is sure to go against that young man's despair."

"He is a new hand," said the banker, "or he would have divided his money into three parts to give himself more chance."

The young man went out without asking for his hat; but

the old watch-dog, who had noted its shabby condition, returned it to him without a word. The gambler mechanically gave up the tally, and went downstairs whistling *Di tanti Palpiti* so feebly, that he himself scarcely heard the delicious notes.

He found himself immediately under the arcades of the Palais-Royal, reached the Rue Saint Honoré, took the direction of the Tuileries, and crossed the gardens with an undecided step. He walked as if he were in some desert, elbowed by men whom he did not see, hearing through all the voices of the crowd one voice alone—the voice of Death. He was lost in the thoughts that benumbed him at last, like the criminals who used to be taken in carts from the Palais de Justice to the Place de Grève, where the scaffold awaited them reddened with all the blood spilt there since 1793.

There is something great and terrible about suicide. Most people's downfalls are not dangerous; they are like children who have not far to fall, and cannot injure themselves; but when a great nature is dashed down, he is bound to fall from a height. He must have been raised almost to the skies; he has caught glimpses of some heaven beyond his reach. Vehement must the storms be which compel a soul to seek for peace from the trigger of a pistol.

How much young power starves and pines away in a garret for want of a friend, for lack of a woman's consolation, in the midst of millions of fellow-creatures, in the presence of a listless crowd that is burdened by its wealth! When one remembers all this, suicide looms large. Between a self-sought death and the abundant hopes whose voices call a young man to Paris, God only knows what may intervene; what contending ideas have striven within the soul; what poems have been set aside; what moans and what despair have been repressed; what abortive masterpieces and vain endeavors! Every suicide is an awful poem of sorrow. Where will you find a work of genius floating above the seas of literature that can compare with this paragraph:

"Yesterday, at four o'clock, a young woman threw herself into the Seine from the Pont des Arts."

Dramas and romances pale before this concise Parisian phrase; so must even that old frontispiece, *The Lamentations of the glorious king of Kaërnavan, put in prison by his children,* the sole remaining fragment of a lost work that drew tears from Sterne at the bare perusal—the same Sterne who deserted his own wife and family.

The stranger was beset with such thoughts as these, which passed in fragments through his mind, like tattered flags fluttering above the combat. If he set aside for a moment the burdens of consciousness and of memory, to watch the flower heads gently swayed by the breeze among the green thickets, a revulsion came over him, life struggled against the oppressive thought of suicide, and his eyes rose to the sky: gray clouds, melancholy gusts of the wind, the stormy atmosphere, all decreed that he should die.

He bent his way toward the Pont Royal, musing over the last fancies of others who had gone before him. He smiled to himself as he remembered that Lord Castlereagh had satisfied the humblest of our needs before he cut his throat, and that the academician Auger had sought for his snuff-box as he went to his death. He analyzed these extravagances, and even examined himself; for as he stood aside against the parapet to allow a porter to pass, his coat had been whitened somewhat by the contact, and he carefully brushed the dust from his sleeve, to his own surprise. He reached the middle of the arch, and looked forebodingly at the water.

"Wretched weather for drowning yourself," said a ragged old woman, who grinned at him; "isn't the Seine cold and dirty?"

His answer was a ready smile, which showed the frenzied nature of his courage; then he shivered all at once as he saw at a distance, by the door of the Tuileries, a shed with an inscription above it in letters twelve inches high: THE ROYAL HUMANE SOCIETY'S APPARATUS.

A vision of M. Dacheux rose before him, equipped by his

philanthropy, calling out and setting in motion the too efficacious oars which break the heads of drowning men, if unluckily they should rise to the surface; he saw a curious crowd collecting, running for a doctor, preparing fumigations; he read the maundering paragraph in the papers, put between notes on a festivity and on the smiles of a ballet-dancer; he heard the francs counted down by the prefect of police to the watermen. As a corpse, he was worth fifteen francs; but now while he lived he was only a man of talent without patrons, without friends, without a mattress to lie on, or any one to speak a word for him—a perfect social cipher, useless to a State which gave itself no trouble about him.

A death in broad daylight seemed degrading to him; he made up his mind to die at night so as to bequeath an unrecognizable corpse to a world which had disregarded the greatness of life. He began his wanderings again, turning towards the Quai Voltaire, imitating the lagging gait of an idler seeking to kill time. As he came down the steps at the end of the bridge, his notice was attracted by the second-hand books displayed on the parapet, and he was on the point of bargaining for some. He smiled, thrust his hands philosophically into his pockets, and fell to strolling on again with a proud disdain in his manner, when he heard to his surprise some coin rattling fantastically in his pocket.

A smile of hope lit his face, and slid from his lips over his features, over his brow, and brought a joyful light to his eyes and his dark cheeks. It was a spark of happiness like one of the red dots that flit over the remains of a burnt scrap of paper; but as it is with the black ashes, so it was with his face, it became dull again when the stranger quickly drew out his hand and perceived three pennies. "Ah, kind gentleman! *carita, carita*: for the love of St. Catherine! only a halfpenny to buy some bread!"

A little chimney sweeper, with puffed cheeks, all black with

soot, and clad in tatters, held out his hand to beg for the man's last pence.

Two paces from the little Savoyard stood an old *pauvre honteux,* sickly and feeble, in wretched garments of ragged druggeting, who asked in a thick, muffled voice:

"Anything you like to give, monsieur; I will pray to God for you . . ."

But the young man turned his eyes on him, and the old beggar stopped without another word, discerning in that mournful face an abandonment of wretchedness more bitter than his own.

"La carita! la carita!"

The stranger threw the coins to the old man and the child, left the footway, and turned towards the houses; the harrowing sight of the Seine fretted him beyond endurance.

"May God lengthen your days!" cried the two beggars.

As he reached the shop window of a print-seller, this man on the brink of death met a young woman alighting from a showy carriage. He looked in delight at her prettiness, at the pale face appropriately framed by the satin of her fashionable bonnet. Her slender form and graceful movements entranced him. Her skirt had been slightly raised as she stepped to the pavement, disclosing a daintily fitting white stocking over the delicate outlines beneath. The young lady went into the shop, purchased albums and sets of lithographs; giving several gold coins for them, which glittered and rang upon the counter. The young man, seemingly occupied with the prints in the window, fixed upon the fair stranger a gaze as eager as man can give, to receive in exchange an indifferent glance, such as lights by accident on a passer-by. For him it was a leave-taking of love and of woman; but his final and strenuous questioning glance was neither understood nor felt by the slight-natured woman there; her color did not rise, her eyes did not droop. What was it to her? one more piece of adulation, yet another sigh only prompted the delightful thought at night, "I looked rather well today."

The young man quickly turned to another picture, and only left it when she returned to her carriage. The horses started off, the final vision of luxury and refinement went under an eclipse, just as that life of his would soon do also. Slowly and sadly he followed the line of the shops, listlessly examining the specimens on view. When the shops came to an end, he reviewed the Louvre, the Institute, the towers of Notre Dame, of the Palais, the Pont des Arts; all these public monuments seemed to have taken their tone from the heavy gray sky.

Fitful gleams of light gave a foreboding look to Paris; like a pretty woman, the city has mysterious fits of ugliness or beauty. So the outer world seemed to be in a plot to steep this man about to die in a painful trance. A prey to the maleficent power which acts relaxingly upon us by the fluid circulating through our nerves, his whole frame seemed gradually to experience a dissolving process. He felt the anguish of these throes passing through him in waves, and the houses and the crowd seemed to surge to and fro in a mist before his eyes. He tried to escape the agitation wrought in his mind by the revulsions of his physical nature, and went toward the shop of a dealer in antiquities, thinking to give a treat to his senses, and to spend the interval till nightfall in bargaining over curiosities.

He sought, one might say, to regain courage and to find a stimulant, like a criminal who doubts his power to reach the scaffold. The consciousness of approaching death gave him, for the time being, the intrepidity of a duchess with a couple of lovers, so that he entered the place with an abstracted look, while his lips displayed a set smile like a drunkard's. Had not life, or rather had not death, intoxicated him? Dizziness soon overcame him again. Things appeared to him in strange colors, or as making slight movements; his irregular pulse was no doubt the cause; the blood that sometimes rushed like a burning torrent through his veins, and sometimes lay torpid and stagnant as tepid water. He merely asked leave to see if the shop contained any curiosities which he required.

A plump-faced young shopman with red hair, in an otter-skin cap, left an old peasant woman in charge of the shop—a sort of feminine Caliban, employed in cleaning a stove made marvelous by Bernard Palissy's work. This youth remarked carelessly:

"Look round, *monsieur!* We have nothing very remarkable here downstairs; but if I may trouble you to go up to the first floor, I will show you some very fine mummies from Cairo, some inlaid pottery, and some carved ebony—*genuine Renaissance* work, just come in, and of perfect beauty."

In the stranger's fearful position this cicerone's prattle and shopman's empty talk seemed like the petty vexations by which narrow minds destroy a man of genius. But as he must even go through with it, he appeared to listen to his guide, answering him by gestures or monosyllables; but imperceptibly he arrogated the privilege of saying nothing, and gave himself up without hindrance to his closing meditations, which were appalling. He had a poet's temperament, his mind had entered by chance on a vast field; and he must see perforce the dry bones of twenty future worlds.

At a first glance the place presented a confused picture in which every achievement, human and divine, was mingled. Crocodiles, monkeys, and serpents stuffed with straw grinned at glass from church windows, seemed to wish to bite sculptured heads, to chase lacquered work, or to scramble up chandeliers. A Sèvres vase, bearing Napoleon's portrait by Mme. Jacotot, stood besides a sphinx dedicated to Sesostris. The beginnings of the world and the events of yesterday were mingled with grotesque cheerfulness. A kitchen jack leaned against a pyx, a republican sabre on a mediæval hackbut. Mme. du Barry, with a star above her head, naked, and surrounded by a cloud, seemed to look longingly out of Latour's pastel at an Indian chibook, while she tried to guess the purpose of the spiral curves that wound towards her. Instruments of death, poniards, curious pistols, and disguised weapons had been flung down pell-mell among the paraphernalia of daily life; porcelain tureens, Dresden plates, trans-

lucent cups from China, old salt-cellars, comfit-boxes belonging to feudal times. A carved ivory ship sped full sail on the back of a motionless tortoise.

The Emperor Augustus remained unmoved and imperial with an air-pump thrust into one eye. Portraits of French sheriffs and Dutch burgomasters, phlegmatic now as when in life, looked down pallid and unconcerned on the chaos of past ages below them.

Every land of earth seemed to have contributed some stray fragment of its learning, some example of its art. Nothing seemed lacking to this philosophical kitchen-midden from a redskin's calumet, a green and golden slipper from the seraglio, a Moorish yataghan, a Tartar idol, to the soldier's tobacco pouch, to the priest's ciborium, and the plumes that once adorned a throne. This extraordinary combination was rendered yet more bizarre by the accidents of lighting, by a multitude of confused reflections of various hues, by the sharp contrast of blacks and whites. Broken cries seemed to reach the ear, unfinished dramas seized upon the imagination, smothered lights caught the eye. A thin coating of inevitable dust covered all the multitudinous corners and convolutions of these objects of various shapes which gave highly picturesque effects.

First of all, the stranger compared the three galleries which civilization, cults, divinities, masterpieces, dominions, carousals, sanity, and madness had filled to repletion, to a mirror with numerous facets, each depicting a world. After this first hazy idea he would fain have selected his pleasures; but by dint of using his eyes, thinking and musing, a fever began to possess him, caused perhaps by the gnawing pain of hunger. The spectacle of so much existence, individual or national, to which these pledges bore witness, ended by numbing his senses—the purpose with which he entered the shop was fulfilled. He had left the real behind, and had climbed gradually up to an ideal world; he had attained to the enchanted palace of ecstasy, whence the universe appeared

to him by fragments and in shapes of flame, as once the future blazed out before the eyes of St. John in Patmos.

A crowd of sorrowing faces, beneficent and appalling, dark and luminous, far and near, gathered in numbers, in myriads, in whole generations. Egypt, rigid and mysterious, arose from her sands in the form of a mummy swathed in black bandages; then the Pharaohs swallowed up nations, that they might build themselves a tomb; and he beheld Moses and the Hebrews and the desert, and a solemn antique world. Fresh and joyous, a marble statue spoke to him from a twisted column of the pleasure-loving myths of Greece and Ionia. Ah! who would not have smiled with him to see, against the earthen red background, the brown-faced maiden dancing with gleeful reverence before the god Priapus, wrought in the fine clay of an Etruscan vase? The Latin queen caressed her chimera.

The whims of Imperial Rome were there in life, the bath was disclosed, the toilette of a languid Julia, dreaming, waiting for her Tibullus. Strong with the might of Arabic spells, the head of Cicero evoked memories of a free Rome, and unrolled before him the scrolls of Titus Livius. The young man beheld *Senatus Populusque Romanus;* consuls, lictors, togas with purple fringes; the fighting in the Forum, the angry people, passed in review before him like the cloudy faces of a dream.

Then Christian Rome predominated in his vision. A painter had laid heaven open; he beheld the Virgin Mary wrapped in a golden cloud among the angels, shining more brightly than the sun, receiving the prayers of sufferers, on whom this second Eve Regenerate smiles pityingly. At the touch of a mosaic, made of various lavas from Vesuvius and Etna, his fancy fled to the hot tawny south of Italy. He was present at Borgia's orgies, he roved among the Abruzzi, sought for Italian love intrigues, grew ardent over pale faces and dark, almond-shaped eyes. He shivered over midnight adventures, cut short by the cool thrust of a jealous blade, as

he saw a mediæval dagger with a hilt wrought like lace, and spots of rust like splashes of blood upon it.

India and its religions took the shape of the idol with his peaked cap of fantastic form, with little bells, clad in silk and gold. Close by, a mat, as pretty as the bayadere who once lay upon it, still gave out a faint scent of sandal wood. His fancy was stirred by a goggle-eyed Chinese monster, with mouth awry and twisted limbs, the invention of a people who, grown weary of the monotony of beauty, found an indescribable pleasure in an infinite variety of ugliness. A salt-cellar from Benvenuto Cellini's workshop carried him back to the Renaissance at its height, to the time when there was no restraint on art or morals, when torture was the sport of sovereigns; and from their councils, churchmen with courtesans' arms about them issued decrees of chastity for simple priests.

On a cameo he saw the conquests of Alexander, the massacres of Pizarro in a matchbox, and religious wars disorderly, fanatical, and cruel, in the shadows of a helmet. Joyous pictures of chivalry were called up by a suit of Milanese armor, brightly polished and richly wrought; a paladin's eyes seemed to sparkle yet under the visor.

This sea of inventions, fashions, furniture, works of art and fiascos, made for him a poem without end. Shapes and colors and projects all lived again for him, but his mind received no clear and perfect conception. It was the poet's task to complete the sketches of the great master, who had scornfully mingled on his palette the hues of the numberless vicissitudes of human life. When the world at large at last released him, when he had pondered over many lands, many epochs, and various empires, the young man came back to the life of the individual. He impersonated fresh characters, and turned his mind to details, rejecting the life of nations as a burden too overwhelming for a single soul.

Yonder was a sleeping child modeled in wax, a relic of Ruysch's collection, an enchanting creation which brought back the happiness of his own childhood. The cotton gar-

ment of a Tahitian maid next fascinated him; he beheld the primitive life of nature, the real modesty of naked chastity, the joys of an idleness natural to mankind, a peaceful fate by a slow river of sweet water under a plantain tree that bears its pleasant manna without the toil of man. Then all at once he became a corsair, investing himself with the terrible poetry that Lara has given to the part: the thought came at the sight of the mother-of-pearl tints of a myriad sea-shells, and grew as he saw madrepores redolent of the sea-weeds and the storms of the Atlantic.

The sea was forgotten again at a distant view of exquisite miniatures; he admired a precious missal in manuscript, adorned with arabesques in gold and blue. Thoughts of peaceful life swayed him; he devoted himself afresh to study and research, longing for the easy life of the monk, devoid alike of cares and pleasures; and from the depths of his cell he looked out upon the meadows, woods, and vineyards of his convent. Pausing before some work of Teniers, he took for his own the helmet of the soldier or the poverty of the artisan; he wished to wear a smoke-begrimed cap with these Flemings, to drink their beer and join their game at cards, and smiled upon the comely plumpness of a peasant woman. He shivered at a snowstorm by Mieris; he seemed to take part in Salvator Rosa's battle-piece; he ran his fingers over a tomahawk from Illinois, and felt his own hair rise as he touched a Cherokee scalping-knife. He marveled over the rebec that he set in the hands of some lady of the land, drank in the musical notes of her ballad, and in the twilight by the gothic arch above the hearth he told his love in a gloom so deep that he could not read his answer in her eyes.

He caught at all delights, at all sorrows; grasped at existence in every form; and endowed the phantoms conjured up from that inert and plastic material so liberally with his own life and feelings, that the sound of his own footsteps reached him as if from another world, or as the hum of Paris reaches the towers of Notre Dame.

He ascended the inner staircase which led to the first floor,

with its votive shields, panoplies, carved shrines, and figures on the wall at every step. Haunted by the strangest shapes, by marvelous creations belonging to the borderland betwixt life and death, he walked as if under the spell of a dream. His own existence became a matter of doubt to him; he was neither wholly alive nor dead, like the curious objects about him. The light began to fade as he reached the show-rooms, but the treasures of gold and silver heaped up there scarcely seemed to need illumination from without. The most extravagant whims of prodigals, who have run through millions to perish in garrets, had left their traces here in this vast bazar of human follies. Here, beside a writing desk, made at the cost of 100,000 francs, and sold for a hundred pence, lay a lock with a secret worth a king's ransom. The human race was revealed in all the grandeur of its wretchedness; in all the splendor of its infinite littleness. An ebony table that an artist might worship, carved after Jean Goujon's designs, in years of toil, had been purchased perhaps at the price of firewood. Precious caskets, and things that fairy hands might have fashioned, lay there in heaps like rubbish.

"You must have the worth of millions here!" cried the young man as he entered the last of an immense suite of rooms, all decorated and gilt by eighteenth century artists.

"Thousands of millions, you might say," said the florid shopman; "but you have seen nothing as yet. Go up to the third floor, and you shall see!"

The stranger followed his guide to a fourth gallery, where one by one there passed before his wearied eyes several pictures by Poussin, a magnificent statue by Michael Angelo, enchanting landscapes by Claude Lorraine, a Gerard Dow (like a stray page from Sterne), Rembrandts, Murillos, and pictures by Velasquez, as dark and full of color as a poem of Byron's; then came classic bas-reliefs, finely-cut agates, wonderful cameos! Works of art upon works of art, till the craftsman's skill palled on the mind, masterpiece after masterpiece till art itself became hateful at last and enthusiasm died.

He came upon a Madonna by Raphael, but he was tired of Raphael; a figure by Correggio never received the glance it demanded of him. A priceless vase of antique porphyry carved round about with pictures of the most grotesquely wanton of Roman divinities, the pride of some Corinna, scarcely drew a smile from him.

The ruins of fifteen hundred vanished years oppressed him; he sickened under all this human thought; felt bored by all this luxury and art. He struggled in vain against the constantly renewed fantastic shapes that sprang up from under his feet, like children of some sportive demon.

Are not fearful poisons set up in the soul by a swift concentration of all her energies, her enjoyments, or ideas; as modern chemistry, in its caprice, repeats the action of creation by some gas or other? Do not many men perish under the shock of the sudden expansion of some moral acid within them?

"What is there in that box?" he inquired, as he reached a large closet—final triumph of human skill, originality, wealth, and splendor, in which there hung a large, square mahogany coffer, suspended from a nail by a silver chain.

"Ah, *monsieur* keeps the key of it," said the stout assistant mysteriously. "If you wish to see the portrait, I will gladly venture to tell him."

"Venture!" said the young man; "then is your master a prince?"

"I don't know what he is," the other answered. Equally astonished, each looked for a moment at the other. Then construing the stranger's silence as an order, the apprentice left him alone in the closet.

Have you never launched into the immensity of time and space as you read the geological writings of Cuvier? Carried by his fancy, have you hung as if suspended by a magician's wand over the illimitable abyss of the past? When the fossil bones of animals belonging to civilizations before the Flood are turned up in bed after bed and layer upon layer of the quarries of Montmartre or among the schists of the Ural

range, the soul receives with dismay a glimpse of millions of peoples forgotten by feeble human memory and unrecognized by permanent divine tradition, peoples whose ashes cover our globe with two feet of earth that yields bread to us and flowers.

Is not Cuvier the great poet of our era? Byron has given admirable expression to certain moral conflicts, but our immortal naturalist has reconstructed past worlds from a few bleached bones; has rebuilt cities, like Cadmus, with monsters' teeth; has animated forests with all the secrets of zoology gleaned from a piece of coal; has discovered a giant population from the footprints of a mammoth. These forms stand erect, grow large, and fill regions commensurate with their giant size. He treats figures like a poet; a naught set beside a seven by him produces awe.

He can call up nothingness before you without the phrases of a charlatan. He searches a lump of gypsum, finds an impression in it, says to you, "Behold!" All at once marble takes an animal shape, the dead come to life, the history of the world is laid open before you. After countless dynasties of giant creatures, races of fish and clans of mollusks, the race of man appears at last as the degenerate copy of a splendid model, which the Creator has perchance destroyed. Emboldened by his gaze into the past, this petty race, children of yesterday, can overstep chaos, can raise a psalm without end, and outline for themselves the story of the Universe in an Apocalypse that reveals the past. After the tremendous resurrection that took place at the voice of this man, the little drop in the nameless Infinite, common to all the spheres, that is ours to use, and that we call Time, seems to us a pitiable moment of life. We ask ourselves the purpose of our triumphs, our hatreds, our loves, overwhelmed as we are by the destruction of so many past universes, and whether it is worth while to accept the pain of life in order that hereafter we may become an intangible speck. Then we remain as if dead, completely torn away from the present till the *valet de*

chambre comes in and says, "*Madame la comtesse* answers that she is expecting *monsieur.*"

All the wonders which had brought the known world before the young man's mind wrought in his soul much the same feeling of dejection that besets the philosopher investigating unknown creatures. He longed more than ever for death as he flung himself back in a curule chair and let his eyes wander across the illusions composing a panorama of the past. The pictures seemed to light up, the Virgin's heads smiled on him, the statues seemed alive. Everything danced and swayed around him, with a motion due to the gloom and the tormenting fever that racked his brain; each monstrosity grimaced at him, while the portraits on the canvas closed their eyes for a little relief. Every shape seemed to tremble and start, and to leave its place gravely or flippantly, gracefully or awkwardly, according to its fashion, character, and surroundings.

A mysterious Sabbath began, rivaling the fantastic scenes witnessed by Faust upon the Brocken. But these optical illusions, produced by weariness, overstrained eyesight, or the accidents of twilight, could not alarm the stranger. The terrors of life had no power over a soul grown familiar with the terrors of death. He even gave himself up, half amused by its bizarre eccentricities, to the influence of this moral galvanism; its phenomena, closely connected with his last thoughts, assured him that he was still alive. The silence about him was so deep that he embarked once more in dreams that grew gradually darker and darker as if by magic, as the light slowly faded. A last struggling ray from the sun lit up rosy answering lights. He raised his head and saw a skeleton dimly visible, with its skull bent doubtfully to one side, as if to say, "The dead will none of thee as yet."

He passed his hand over his forehead to shake off the drowsiness, and felt a cold breath of air as an unknown furry something swept past his cheeks. He shivered. A muffled clatter of the windows followed; it was a bat, he fancied, that

A little old man turned the light of a lamp upon him

had given him this chilly sepulchral caress. He could yet dimly see for a moment the shapes that surrounded him, by the vague light in the west; then all these inanimate objects were blotted out in uniform darkness. Night and the hour of death had suddenly come. Thenceforward, for a while, he lost consciousness of the things about him; he was either buried in deep meditation, or sleep overcame him, brought on by weariness or by the stress of those many thoughts that lacerated his heart.

Suddenly he thought that an awful voice called him by name; it was like some feverish nightmare, when at a step the dreamer falls headlong over into an abyss, and he trembled. He closed his eyes, dazzled by bright rays from a red circle of light that shone out from the shadows. In the midst of the circle stood a little old man who turned the light of the lamp upon him, yet he had not heard him enter, nor move, nor speak. There was something magical about the apparition. The boldest man, awakened in such a sort, would have felt alarmed at the sight of this figure, which might have issued from some sarcophagus hard by.

A curiously youthful look in the unmoving eyes of the spectre forbade the idea of anything supernatural; but for all that, in the brief space between his dreaming and waking life, the young man's judgment remained philosophically suspended, as Descartes advises. He was, in spite of himself, under the influence of an unaccountable hallucination, a mystery that out pride rejects, and that our imperfect science vainly tries to resolve.

Imagine a short old man, thin and spare, in a long black velvet gown girded round him by a thick silk cord. His long white hair escaped on either side of his face from under a black velvet cap which closely fitted his head and made a formal setting for his countenance. His gown enveloped his body like a winding sheet, so that all that was left visible was a narrow bleached human face. But for the wasted arm, thin as a draper's wand, which held aloft the lamp that cast all its light upon him, the face would have seemed to hang in mid

air. A gray pointed beard concealed the chin of this fantastical appearance, and gave him the look of one of those Jewish types which serve artists as models for Moses. His lips were so thin and colorless that it needed a close inspection to find the lines of his mouth at all in the pallid face. His great wrinkled brow and hollow bloodless cheeks, the inexorably stern expression of his small green eyes that no longer possessed eyebrows or lashes, might have convinced the stranger that Gerard Dow's "Money Changer" had come down from his frame. The craftiness of an inquisitor, revealed in those curving wrinkles and creases that wound about his temples, indicated a profound knowledge of life. There was no deceiving this man, who seemed to possess a power of detecting the secrets of the wariest heart.

The wisdom and the moral codes of every people seemed gathered up in his passive face, just as all the productions of the globe had been heaped up in his dusty showrooms. He seemed to possess the tranquil luminous vision of some god before whom all things are open, or the haughty power of a man who knows all things.

With two strokes of the brush a painter could have so altered the expression of this face, that what had been a serene representation of the Eternal Father should change to the sneering mask of a Mephistopheles; for though sovereign power was revealed by the forehead, mocking folds lurked about the mouth. He must have sacrificed all the joys of earth, as he had crushed all human sorrows beneath his potent will. The man at the brink of death shivered at the thought of the life led by this spirit, so solitary and remote from our world; joyless, since he had no one illusion left; painless, because pleasure had ceased to exist for him. There he stood, motionless and serene as a star in a bright mist. His lamp lit up the obscure closet, just as his green eyes, with their quiet malevolence, seemed to shed a light on the moral world.

This was the strange spectacle that startled the young man's returning sight, as he shook off the dreamy fancies and

thoughts of death that had lulled him. An instant of dismay, a momentary return to belief in nursery tales, may be forgiven him, seeing that his senses were obscured. Much thought had wearied his mind, and his nerves were exhausted with the strain of the tremendous drama within him, and by the scenes that had heaped on him all the horrid pleasures that a piece of opium can produce.

But this apparition had appeared in Paris, on the Quai Voltaire, and in the nineteenth century; the time and place made sorcery impossible. The idol of French scepticism had died in the house just opposite, the disciple of Gay-Lussac and Arago, who had held the charlatanism of intellect in contempt. And yet the stranger submitted himself to the influence of an imaginative spell, as all of us do at times, when we wish to escape from an inevitable certainty, or to tempt the power of Providence. So some mysterious apprehension of a strange force made him tremble before the old man with the lamp. All of us have been stirred in the same way by the sight of Napoleon, or of some other great man, made illustrious by his genius or by fame.

"You wish to see Raphael's portrait of Jesus Christ, monsieur?" the old man asked politely. There was something metallic in the clear, sharp ring of his voice.

He set the lamp upon a broken column, so that all its light might fall on the brown case.

At the sacred names of Christ and Raphael the young man showed some curiosity. The merchant, who no doubt looked for this, pressed a spring, and suddenly the mahogany panel slid noiselessly back in its groove, and discovered the canvas to the stranger's admiring gaze. At sight of this deathless creation, he forgot his fancies in the show-rooms and the freaks of his dreams, and became himself again. The old man became a being of flesh and blood, very much alive, with nothing chimerical about him, and took up his existence at once upon solid earth.

The sympathy and love, and the gentle serenity in the divine face, exerted an instant sway over the younger

spectator. Some influence falling from heaven bade cease the burning torment that consumed the marrow of his bones. The head of the Saviour of mankind seemed to issue from among the shadows represented by a dark background; an aureole of light shone out brightly from his hair; an impassioned belief seemed to glow through him, and to thrill every feature. The word of life had just been uttered by those red lips, the sacred sounds seemed to linger still in the air; the spectator besought the silence for those captivating parables, harkened for them in the future, and had to turn to the teachings of the past. The untroubled peace of the divine eyes, the comfort of sorrowing souls, seemed an interpretation of the Evangel. The sweet triumphant smile revealed the secret of the Catholic religion, which sums up all things in the precept, "Love one another." This picture breathed the spirit of prayer, enjoined forgiveness, overcame self, caused sleeping powers of good to waken. For this work of Raphael's had the imperious charm of music; you were brought under the spell of memories of the past; his triumph was so absolute that the artist was forgotten. The witchery of the lamplight heightened the wonder; the head seemed at times to flicker in the distance, enveloped in cloud.

"I covered the surface of that picture with gold pieces," said the merchant carelessly.

"And now for death!" cried the young man, awakened from his musings. His last thought had recalled his fate to him, as it led him imperceptibly back from the forlorn hopes to which he had clung.

"Ah, ha! then my suspicions were well founded!" said the other, and his hands held the young man's wrists in a grip like that of a vice.

The younger man smiled wearily at his mistake, and said gently:

"You, sir, have nothing to fear; it is not your life, but my own that is in question. . . . But why should I hide a harmless fraud?" he went on, after a look at the anxious

old man. "I came to see your treasures to while away the time till night should come and I could drown myself decently. Who would grudge this last pleasure to a poet and a man of science?"

While he spoke, the jealous merchant watched the haggard face of his pretended customer with keen eyes. Perhaps the mournful tones of his voice reassured him, or he also read the dark signs of fate in the faded features that had made the gamblers shudder; he released his hands, but, with a touch of caution, due to the experience of some hundred years at least, he stretched his arm out to a sideboard as if to steady himself, took up a little dagger, and said:

"Have you been a supernumerary clerk of the Treasury for three years without receiving any perquisites?"

The stranger could scarcely suppress a smile as he shook his head.

"Perhaps your father has expressed his regret for your birth a little too sharply? Or have you disgraced yourself?"

"If I meant to be disgraced, I should live."

"You have been hissed perhaps at the Funambules? Or you have had to compose couplets to pay for your mistress' funeral? Do you want to be cured of the gold fever? Or to be quit of the spleen? For what blunder is your life a forfeit?"

"You must not look among the common motives that impel suicides for the reason of my death. To spare myself the task of disclosing my unheard-of sufferings, for which language has no name, I will tell you this—that I am in the deepest, most humiliating, and most cruel trouble, and," he went on in proud tones that harmonized ill with the words just uttered, "I have no wish to beg for either help or sympathy."

"Eh! eh!"

The two syllables which the old man pronounced resembled the sound of a rattle. Then he went on thus:

"Without compelling you to entreat me, without making you blush for it, and without giving you so much as a

French centime, a para from the Levant, a German heller, a Russian kopeck, a Scottish farthing, a single obolus or sestertius from the ancient world, or one piastre from the new, without offering you anything whatever in gold, silver, or copper, notes or drafts, I will make you richer, more powerful, and of more consequence than a constitutional king."

The younger man thought that the older was in his dotage, and waited in bewilderment without venturing to reply.

"Turn round," said the merchant, suddenly catching up the lamp in order to light up the opposite wall; "look at that leathern skin," he went on.

The young man rose abruptly, and showed some surprise at the sight of a piece of shagreen which hung on the wall behind his chair. It was only about the size of a fox's skin, but it seemed to fill the deep shadows of the place with such brilliant rays that it looked like a small comet, an appearance at first sight inexplicable. The young sceptic went up to this so-called talisman, which was to rescue him from his woes, with a scoffing phrase in his thoughts. Still a harmless curiosity led him to bend over it and look at it from all points of view, and he soon found out the cause of its singular brilliancy. The dark grain of the leather had been so carefully burnished and polished, the striped markings of the graining were so sharp and clear, that every particle of the surface of the bit of Oriental leather was in itself a focus which concentrated the light, and reflected it vividly.

He accounted for this phenomenon categorically to the old man, who only smiled meaningly by way of answer. His superior smile led the young scientific man to fancy that he himself had been deceived by some imposture. He had no wish to carry one more puzzle to his grave, and hastily turned the skin over, like some child eager to find out the mysteries of a new toy.

"Ah," he cried, "here is the mark of the seal which they call in the East the Signet of Solomon."

"So you know that, then?" asked the merchant. His

peculiar method of laughter, two or three quick breathings through the nostrils, said more than any words however eloquent.

"Is there anybody in the world simple enough to believe in that idle fancy?" said the young man, nettled by the spitefulness of the silent chuckle. "Don't you know," he continued, "that the superstitions of the East have perpetuated the mystical form and the counterfeit characters of the symbol, which represents a mythical dominion? I have no more laid myself open to a charge of credulity in this case, than if I had mentioned sphinxes or griffins, whose existence mythology in a manner admits."

"As you are an Orientalist," replied the other, "perhaps you can read that sentence."

He held the lamp close to the talisman, which the young man held towards him, and pointed out some characters inlaid in the surface of the wonderful skin, as if they had grown on the animal to which it once belonged.

"I must admit," said the stranger, "that I have no idea how the letters could be engraved so deeply on the skin of a wild ass." And he turned quickly to the tables strewn with curiosities and seemed to look for something.

"What is it that you want?" asked the old man.

"Something that will cut the leather, so that I can see whether the letters are printed or inlaid."

The old man held out his stiletto. The stranger took it and tried to cut the skin above the lettering; but when he had removed a thin shaving of leather from them, the characters still appeared below, so clear and so exactly like the surface impression, that for a moment he was not sure that he had cut anything away after all.

"The craftsmen of the Levant have secrets known only to themselves," he said, half in vexation, as he eyed the characters of this Oriental sentence.

"Yes," said the old man, "it is better to attribute it to man's agency than to God's."

The mysterious words were thus arranged:

لو ملكتنى ملكت آلكلّ
ولكن عمرك ملكى
واراد الله هكذا
اطلب وستنال مطالبك
ولكن قسن مطالبك على عمرك
وهى هاهنا
فبكل مرامك استنسزل ايامك
أتريد ىّ
الله مجيبك
آمين

Or, as it runs in English:

POSSESSING ME THOU SHALT POSSESS ALL THINGS.
BUT THY LIFE IS MINE, FOR GOD HAS SO WILLED IT.
WISH, AND THY WISHES SHALL BE FULFILLED;
BUT MEASURE THY DESIRES, ACCORDING
TO THE LIFE THAT IS IN THEE.
THIS IS THY LIFE,
WITH EACH WISH I MUST SHRINK
EVEN AS THY OWN DAYS.
WILT THOU HAVE ME? TAKE ME.
GOD WILL HEARKEN UNTO THEE.
SO BE IT!

"So you read Sanskrit fluently," said the old man. "You have been in Persia perhaps, or in Bengal?"

"No, sir," said the stranger, as he felt the emblematical skin curiously. It was almost as rigid as a sheet of metal.

The old merchant set the lamp back again upon the column, giving the other a look as he did so. "He has given up the notion of dying already," the glance said with phlegmatic irony.

"Is it a jest, or is it an enigma?" asked the younger man.

The other shook his head and said soberly:

"I don't know how to answer you. I have offered this talisman with its terrible powers to men with more energy in them than you seem to me to have; but though they laughed at the questionable power it might exert over their futures, not one of them was ready to venture to conclude the fateful contract proposed by an unknown force. I am of their opinion, I have doubted and refrained, and——"

"Have you never even tried its power?" interrupted the young stranger.

"Tried it!" exclaimed the old man. "Suppose that you were on the column in the Place Vendôme, would you try flinging yourself into space? Is it possible to stay the course of life? Has a man ever been known to die by halves? Before you came here, you had made up your mind to kill yourself, but all at once a mystery fills your mind, and you think no more about death. You child! Does not any one day of your life afford mysteries more absorbing? Listen to me. I saw the licentious days of Regency. I was like you, then, in poverty; I have begged my bread; but for all that, I am now a centenarian with a couple of years to spare, and a millionaire to boot. Misery was the making of me, ignorance has made me learned. I will tell you in a few words the great secret of human life. By two instinctive processes man exhausts the springs of life within him. Two verbs cover all the forms which these two causes of death may take—To Will and To have your Will. Between these two limits of human activity the wise have discovered an intermediate formula, to which I owe my good fortune and long life. To Will consumes us, and To have our Will destroys us, but To Know steeps our feeble organisms in perpetual calm. In me Thought has destroyed Will, so that Power is relegated to

the ordinary functions of my economy. In a word, it is not in the heart which can be broken, nor in the senses that become deadened, but it is in the brain that cannot waste away and survives everything else, that I have set my life. Moderation has kept mind and body unruffled. Yet, I have seen the whole world. I have learned all languages, lived after every manner. I have lent a Chinaman money, taking his father's corpse as a pledge, slept in an Arab's tent on the security of his bare word, signed contracts in every capital of Europe, and left my gold without hesitation in savage wigwams. I have attained everything, because I have known how to despise all things.

"My one ambition has been to see. Is not Sight in a manner Insight? And to have knowledge or insight, is not that to have instinctive possession? To be able to discover the very substance of fact and to unite its essence to our essence? Of material possession what abides with you but an idea? Think, then, how glorious must be the life of a man who can stamp all realities upon his thought, place the springs of happiness within himself, and draw thence uncounted pleasures in idea, unsoiled by earthly stains. Thought is a key to all treasures; the miser's gains are ours without his cares. Thus I have soared above this world, where my enjoyments have been intellectual joys. I have reveled in the contemplation of seas, peoples, forests, and mountains! I have seen all things, calmly, and without weariness; I have set my desires on nothing; I have waited in expectation of everything. I have walked to and fro in the world as in a garden round about my own dwelling. Troubles, loves, ambitions, losses, and sorrows, as men call them, are for me ideas, which I transmute into waking dreams; I express and transpose instead of feeling them; instead of permitting them to prey upon my life, I dramatize and expand them; I divert myself with them as if they were romances which I could read by the power of vision within me. As I have never overtaxed my constitution, I still enjoy robust health; and as my mind is endowed with all the force that I have not wasted, this

head of mine is even better furnished than my galleries. The true millions lie here," he said, striking his forehead. "I spend delicious days in communings with the past; I summon before me whole countries, places, extents of sea, the fair faces of history. In my imaginary seraglio I have all the women that I have never possessed. Your wars and revolutions come up before me for judgment. What is a feverish fugitive admiration for some more or less brightly colored piece of flesh and blood; some more or less rounded human form; what are all the disasters that wait on your erratic whims, compared with the magnificent power of conjuring up the whole world within your soul, compared with the immeasurable joys of movement, unstrangled by the cords of time, unclogged by the fetters of space; the joys of beholding all things, of comprehending all things, of leaning over the parapet of the world to question the other spheres, to harken to the voice of God? There," he burst out, vehemently, "there are To Will and To have your Will, both together," he pointed to the bit of shagreen; "there are your social ideas, your immoderate desires, your excesses, your pleasures that end in death, your sorrows that quicken the pace of life, for pain is perhaps but a violent pleasure. Who could determine the point where pleasure becomes pain, where pain is still a pleasure? Is not the utmost brightness of the ideal world soothing to us, while the lightest shadows of the physical world annoy? Is not knowledge the secret of wisdom? And what is folly but a riotous expenditure of Will or Power?"

"Very good then, a life of riotous excess for me!" said the stranger, pouncing upon the piece of shagreen.

"Young man, beware!" cried the other with incredible vehemence.

"I had resolved my existence into thought and study," the stranger replied; "and yet they have not even supported me. I am not to be gulled by a sermon worthy of Swedenborg, nor by your Oriental amulet, nor yet by your charitable endeavors to keep me in a world wherein existence is no

longer possible for me. . . . Let me see now," he added, clutching the talisman convulsively, as he looked at the old man, "I wish for a royal banquet, a carouse worthy of this century, which, it is said, has brought everything to perfection! Let me have young boon companions, witty, unwarped by prejudice, merry to the verge of madness! Let one wine succeed another, each more biting and perfumed than the last, and strong enough to bring about three days of delirium! Passionate women's forms should grace that night! I would be borne away to unknown regions beyond the confines of this world, by the car and four-winged steed of a frantic and uproarious orgy. Let us ascend to the skies, or plunge ourselves in the mire. I do not know if one soars or sinks at such moments, and I do not care! Next, I bid this enigmatical power to concentrate all delights for me in one single joy. Yes, I must comprehend every pleasure of earth and heaven in the final embrace that is to kill me. Therefore, after the wine, I wish to hold high festival to Priapus, with songs that might rouse the dead, and kisses without end; the sound of them should pass like the crackling of flame through Paris, should revive the heat of youth and passion in husband and wife, even in hearts of seventy years."

A laugh burst from the little old man. It rang in the young man's ears like an echo from hell, and tyrannously cut him short. He said no more.

"Do you imagine that my floors are going to open suddenly, so that luxuriously-appointed tables may rise through them, and guests from another world? No, no, young madcap. You have entered into the compact now, and there is an end of it. Henceforward, your wishes will be accurately fulfilled, but at the expense of your life. The compass of your days, visible in that skin, will contract according to the strength and number of your desires, from the least to the most extravagant. The Brahmin from whom I had this skin once explained to me that it would bring about a mysterious connection between the fortunes and wishes of its possessor.

Your first wish is a vulgar one, which I could fulfil, but I leave that to the issues of your new existence. After all, you were wishing to die; very well, your suicide is only put off for a time."

The stranger was surprised and irritated that this peculiar old man persisted in not taking him seriously. A half philanthropic intention peeped so clearly forth from his last jesting observation, that he exclaimed:

"I shall soon see, sir, if any change comes over my fortunes in the time it will take to cross the width of the quay. But I should like us to be quits for such a momentous service; that is, if you are not laughing at an unlucky wretch, so I wish that you may fall in love with an opera-dancer. You would understand the pleasures of intemperance then, and might perhaps grow lavish of the wealth that you have husbanded so philosophically."

He went out without heeding the old man's heavy sigh, went back through the galleries and down the staircase, followed by the stout assistant who vainly tried to light his passage; he fled with the haste of a robber caught in the act. Blinded by a kind of delirium, he did not even notice the unexpected flexibility of the piece of shagreen, which coiled itself up, pliant as a glove in his excited fingers, till it would go into the pocket of his coat, where he mechanically thrust it. As he rushed out of the door into the street, he ran up against three young men who were passing arm-in-arm.

"Brute!"

"Idiot!"

Such were the gratifying expressions exchanged between them.

"Why, it is Raphael!"

"Good! we were looking for you."

"What! it is you, then?"

These three friendly exclamations quickly followed the insults, as the light of a street lamp, flickering in the wind, fell upon the astonished faces of the group.

"My dear fellow, you must come with us!" said the young man that Raphael had all but knocked down.

"What is all this about?"

"Come along, and I will tell you the history of it as we go."

By fair means or foul, Raphael must go along with his friends towards the Pont des Arts; they surrounded him, and linked him by the arm among their merry band.

"We have been after you for about a week," the speaker went on. "At your respectable hotel *de Saint Quentin,* where, by the way, the sign with the alternate black and red letters cannot be removed, and hangs out just as it did in the time of Jean Jacques, that Leonarda of yours told us that you were off into the country. For all that, we certainly did not look like duns, creditors, sheriff's officers, or the like. But no matter! Rastignac had seen you the evening before at the Bouffons; we took courage again, and made it a point of honor to find out whether you were roosting in a tree in the Champs-Elysées, or in one of those philanthropic abodes where the beggars sleep on a twopenny rope, or if, more luckily, you were bivouacking in some boudoir or other. We could not find you anywhere. Your name was not in the jailers' registers at the St. Pelagie nor at La Force! Government departments, *cafés,* libraries, lists of prefects' names, newspaper offices, restaurants, greenrooms—to cut it short, every lurking place in Paris, good or bad, has been explored in the most expert manner. We bewailed the loss of a man endowed with such genius, that one might look to find him either at Court or in the common jails. We talked of canonizing you as a hero of July, and, upon my word, we regretted you!"

As he spoke, the friends were crossing the Pont des Arts. Without listening to them, Raphael looked at the Seine, at the clamoring waves that reflected the lights of Paris. Above that river, in which but now he had thought to fling himself, the old man's prediction had been fulfilled, the hour of his death had been already put back by fate.

"We really regretted you," said his friend, still pursuing his theme. "It was a question of a plan in which we included you as a superior person, that is to say, somebody who can put himself above other people. The constitutional thimble-rig is carried on to-day, dear boy, more seriously than ever. The infamous monarchy, displaced by the heroism of the people, was a sort of drab, you could laugh and revel with her; but La Patrie is a shrewish and virtuous wife, and willy-nilly you must take her prescribed endearments. Then besides, as you know, authority passed over from the Tuileries to the journalists, at the time when the Budget changed its quarters and went from the Faubourg Saint-Germain to the Chaussée d'Antin. But this you may not know perhaps. The Government, that is, the aristocracy of lawyers and bankers who represent the country to-day, just as the priests used to do in the time of the monarchy, has felt the necessity of mystifying the worthy people of France with a few new words and old ideas, like philosophers of every school, and all strong intellects ever since time began. So now Royalist-national ideas must be inculcated, by proving to us that it is far better to pay twelve million francs, thirty-three centimes to La Patrie, represented by Messieurs Such-and-Such, than to pay eleven hundred million francs, nine centimes to a king who used to say *I* instead of *we*. In a word, a journal, with two or three hundred thousand francs, good, at the back of it, has just been started, with a view to making an opposition paper to content the discontented, without prejudice to the national government of the citizen-king. We scoff at liberty as at despotism now, and at religion or incredulity quite impartially. And since, for us, 'our country' means a capital where ideas circulate and are sold at so much a line, a succulent dinner every day, and the play at frequent intervals, where profligate women swarm, where suppers last on into the next day, and light loves are hired by the hour like cabs; and since Paris will always be the most adorable of all countries, the country of joy, liberty, wit, pretty women, *mauvais sujets,* and good wine; where the truncheon of

authority never makes itself disagreeably felt, because one is so close to those who wield it,—we, therefore, sectaries of the god Mephistopheles, have engaged to whitewash the public mind, to give fresh costumes to the actors, to put a new plank or two in the government booth, to doctor doctrinaires, and warm up old Republicans, to touch up the Bonapartists a bit, and revictual the Centre; provided that we are allowed to laugh *in petto* at both kings and peoples, to think one thing in the morning and another at night, and to lead a merry life *à la* Panurge, or to recline upon soft cushions, *more orientali.*

"The sceptre of this burlesque and macaronic kingdom," he went on, "we have reserved for you; so we are taking you straightway to a dinner given by the founder of the said newspaper, a retired banker, who, at a loss to know what to do with his money, is going to buy some brains with it. You will be welcomed as a brother, we shall hail you as king of these free lances who will undertake anything; whose perspicacity discovers the intentions of Austria, England, or Russia before either Russia, Austria, or England have formed any. Yes, we will invest you with the sovereignty of those puissant intellects which give to the world its Mirabeaus, Talleyrands, Pitts, and Metternichs—all the clever Crispins who treat the destinies of a kingdom as gamblers' stakes, just as ordinary men play dominoes for *kirschenwasser.* We have given you out to be the most undaunted champion who ever wrestled in a drinking-bout at close quarters with the monster called Carousal, whom all bold spirits wish to try a fall with; we have gone so far as to say that you have never yet been worsted. I hope you will not make liars of us. Taillefer, our amphitryon, has undertaken to surpass the circumscribed saturnalias of the petty modern Lucullus. He is rich enough to infuse pomp into trifles, and style and charm into dissipation. . . Are you listening, Raphael?" asked the orator, interrupting himself.

"Yes," answered the young man, less surprised by the accomplishment of his wishes than by the natural manner in which the events had come about.

He could not bring himself to believe in magic, but he marveled at the accidents of human fate.

"Yes, you say, just as if you were thinking of your grandfather's demise," remarked one of his neighbors.

"Ah!" cried Raphael, "I was thinking, my friends, that we are in a fair way to become very great scoundrels," and there was an ingenuousness in his tones that set these writers, the hope of young France, in a roar. "So far our blasphemies have been uttered over our cups; we have passed our judgments on life while drunk, and taken men and affairs in an after-dinner frame of mind. We were innocent of action; we were bold in words. But now we are to be branded with the hot iron of politics; we are going to enter the convict's prison and to drop our illusions. Although one has no belief left, except in the devil, one may regret the paradise of one's youth and the age of innocence, when we devoutly offered the tip of our tongue to some good priest for the consecrated wafer of the sacrament. Ah, my good friends, our first peccadilloes gave us so much pleasure because the consequent remorse set them off and lent a keen relish to them; but nowadays——"

"Oh! now," said the first speaker, "there is still left——"

"What?" asked another.

"Crime——"

"There is a word as high as the gallows and deeper than the Seine," said Raphael.

"Oh, you don't understand me; I mean political crime. Since this morning, a conspirator's life is the only one I covet. I don't know that the fancy will last over to-morrow, but to-night at least my gorge rises at the anæmic life of our civilization and its railroad evenness. I am seized with a passion for the miseries of the retreat from Moscow, for the excitements of the Red Corsair, or for a smuggler's life. I should like to go to Botany Bay, as we have no Chartreux left us here in France; it is a sort of infirmary reserved for little Lord Byrons who, having crumpled up their lives like a serviette after dinner, have nothing left to do but to set their

country ablaze, blow their own brains out, plot for a republic, or clamor for a war——"

"Émile," Raphael's neighbor called eagerly to the speaker, "on my honor, but for the revolution of July I would have taken orders, and gone off down into the country somewhere to lead the life of an animal, and——"

"And you would have read your breviary through every day."

"Yes."

"You are a coxcomb!"

"Why, we read the newspapers as it is!"

"Not bad that, for a journalist! But hold your tongue, we are going through a crowd of subscribers. Journalism, look you, is the religion of modern society, and has even gone a little further."

"What do you mean?"

"Its pontiffs are not obliged to believe in it any more than the people are."

Chatting thus, like good fellows who have known their *De Viris illustribus* for years past, they reached a mansion in the Rue Joubert.

Émile was a journalist who had acquired more reputation by dint of doing nothing than others had derived from their achievements. A bold, caustic, and powerful critic, he possessed all the qualities that his defects permitted. An outspoken giber, he made numberless epigrams on a friend to his face; but would defend him, if absent, with courage and loyalty. He laughed at everything, even at his own career. Always impecunious, he yet lived, like all men of his calibre, plunged in unspeakable indolence. He would fling some word containing whole volumes in the teeth of folk who could not put a syllable of sense into their books. He lavished promises that he never fulfilled; he made a pillow of his luck and reputation, on which he slept, and ran the risk of waking up to old age in a workhouse. A steadfast friend to the gallows foot, a cynical swaggerer with a child's simplicity, a worker only from necessity or caprice.

"In the language of Maître Alcofribas, we are about to make a famous *tronçon de chière lie,*" he remarked to Raphael as he pointed out the flower-stands that made a perfumed forest of the staircase.

"I like a vestibule to be well warmed and richly carpeted," Raphael said. "Luxury in the peristyle is not common in France. I feel as if life had begun anew here."

"And up above we are going to drink and make merry once more, my dear Raphael. Ah! yes," he went on, "and I hope we are going to come off conquerors, too, and walk over everybody else's head."

As he spoke, he jestingly pointed to the guests. They were entering a large room which shone with gilding and lights, and there all the younger men of note in Paris welcomed them. Here was one who had just revealed fresh powers; his first picture vied with the glories of Imperial art. There, another, who but yesterday had launched forth a volume, an acrid book filled with a sort of literary arrogance, which opened up new ways to the modern school. A sculptor, not far away, with vigorous power visible in his rough features, was chatting with one of those unenthusiastic scoffers who can either see excellence anywhere or nowhere, as it happens. Here, the cleverest of our caricaturists, with mischievous eyes and bitter tongue, lay in wait for epigrams to translate into pencil strokes; there, stood the young and audacious writer, who distilled the quintessence of political ideas better than any other man, or compressed the work of some prolific writer as he held him up to ridicule; he was talking with the poet whose works would have eclipsed all the writings of the time if his ability had been as strenuous as his hatreds. Both were trying not to say the truth while they kept clear of lies, as they exchanged flattering speeches. A famous musician administered soothing consolation in a rallying fashion, to a young politician who had just fallen, quite unhurt, from his rostrum. Young writers who lacked style stood beside other young writers who lacked ideas, and authors of poetical prose by prosaic poets.

At the sight of all these incomplete beings, a simple Saint Simonian, ingenuous enough to believe in his own doctrine, charitably paired them off, designing, no doubt, to convert them into monks of his order. A few men of science mingled in the conversation, like nitrogen in the atmosphere, and several *vaudevillistes* shed rays like the sparkling diamonds that give neither light nor heat. A few paradox-mongers, laughing up their sleeves at any folk who embraced their likes or dislikes in men or affairs, had already begun a two-edged policy, conspiring against all systems, without committing themselves to any side. Then there was the self-appointed critic who admires nothing, and will blow his nose in the middle of a *cavatina* at the Bouffons, who applauds before any one else begins, and contradicts every one who says what he himself was about to say; he was there giving out the sayings of wittier men for his own. Of all the assembled guests, a future lay before some five; ten or so should acquire a fleeting renown; as for the rest, like all mediocrities, they might apply to themselves the famous falsehood of Louis XVIII., Union and oblivion.

The anxious jocularity of a man who is expending two thousand crowns sat on their host. His eyes turned impatiently towards the door from time to time, seeking one of his guests who kept him waiting. Very soon a stout little person appeared, who was greeted by a complimentary murmur; it was the notary who had invented the newspaper that very morning. A valet-de-chambre in black opened the doors of a vast dining-room, whither every one went without ceremony, and took his place at an enormous table.

Raphael took a last look round the room before he left it. His wish had been realized to the full. The rooms were adorned with silk and gold. Countless wax tapers set in handsome candelabra lit up the slightest details of gilded friezes, the delicate bronze sculpture, and the splendid colors of the furniture. The sweet scent of rare flowers, set in stands tastefully made of bamboo, filled the air. Everything, even the curtains, was pervaded by elegance without preten-

sion, and there was a certain imaginative charm about it all which acted like a spell on the mind of a needy man.

"An income of a hundred thousand livres a year is a very nice beginning of the catechism, and a wonderful assistance to putting morality into our actions," he said, sighing. "Truly my sort of virtue can scarcely go afoot, and vice means, to my thinking, a garret, a threadbare coat, a gray hat in winter time, and sums owing to the porter. . . . I should like to live in the lap of luxury a year, or six months, no matter! And then afterwards, die. I should have known, exhausted, and consumed a thousand lives, at any rate."

"Why, you are taking the tone of a stockbroker in good luck," said Émile, who overheard him. "Pooh! your riches would be a burden to you as soon as you found that they would spoil your chances of coming out above the rest of us. Hasn't the artist always kept the balance true between the poverty of riches and the riches of poverty? And isn't struggle a necessity to some of us? Look out for your digestion, and only look," he added, with a mock-heroic gesture, "at the majestic, thrice holy, and edifying appearance of this amiable capitalist's dining-room. That man has in reality only made his money for our benefit. Isn't he a kind of sponge of the polyp order, overlooked by naturalists, which should be carefully squeezed before he is left for his heirs to feed upon? There is style, isn't there, about those bas-reliefs that adorn the walls? And the lustres, and the pictures, what luxury well carried out! If one may believe those who envy him, or who know, or think they know, the origins of his life, then this man got rid of a German and some others—his best friend for one, and the mother of that friend, during the Revolution. Could you house crimes under the venerable Taillefer's silvering locks? He looks to me a very worthy man. Only see how the silver sparkles, and is every glittering ray like the stab of a dagger to him? . . . Let us go in, one might as well believe in Mahomet. If common report speak truth, here are thirty men of talent, and good fellows too, prepared to dine off the flesh and blood of a whole

family; . . . and here are we ourselves, a pair of youngsters full of open-hearted enthusiasm, and we shall be partakers in his guilt. I have a mind to ask our capitalist whether he is a respectable character. . . ."

"No, not now," cried Raphael, "but when he is dead drunk, we shall have had our dinner then."

The two friends sat down laughing. First of all, by a glance more rapid than a word, each paid his tribute of admiration to the splendid general effect of the long table, white as a bank of freshly-fallen snow, with its symmetrical line of covers, crowned with their pale golden rolls of bread. Rainbow colors gleamed in the starry rays of light reflected by the glass; the lights of the tapers crossed and recrossed each other indefinitely; the dishes covered with their silver domes whetted both appetite and curiosity.

Few words were spoken. Neighbors exchanged glances as the Maderia circulated. Then the first course appeared in all its glory; it would have done honor to the late Cambacérès, Brillat-Savarin would have celebrated it. The wines of Bordeaux and Burgundy, white and red, were royally lavished. This first part of the banquet might have been compared in every way to a rendering of some classical tragedy. The second act grew a trifler noisier. Every guest had had a fair amount to drink, and had tried various *crûs* at his pleasure, so that as the remains of the magnificent first course were removed, tumultuous discussions began; a pale brow here and there began to flush, sundry noses took a purpler hue, faces lit up, and eyes sparkled.

While intoxication was only dawning, the conversation did not overstep the bounds of civility; but banter and *bon mots* slipped by degrees from every tongue; and then slander began to rear its little snake's head, and spoke in dulcet tones; a few shrewd ones here and there gave heed to it, hoping to keep their heads. So the second course found their minds somewhat heated. Every one ate as he spoke, spoke while he ate, and drank without heeding the quantity of the liquor, the wine was so biting, the bouquet so fragrant, the example

around so infectious. Taillefer made a point of stimulating his guests, and plied them with the formidable wines of the Rhone, with fierce Tokay, and heady old Roussillon.

The champagne, impatiently expected and lavishly poured out, was a scourge of fiery sparks to these men, released like post-horses from some mail-coach by a relay; they let their spirits gallop away into the wilds of argument to which no one listened, began to tell stories which had no auditors, and repeatedly asked questions to which no answer was made. Only the loud voice of wassail could be heard, a voice made up of a hundred confused clamors, which rose and grew like a *crescendo* of Rossini's. Insidious toasts, swagger, and challenges followed.

Each renounced any pride in his own intellectual capacity, in order to vindicate that of hogsheads, casks, and vats; and each made noise enough for two. A time came when the footmen smiled, while their masters all talked at once. A philosopher would have been interested, doubtless, by the singularity of the thoughts expressed, a politician would have been amazed by the incongruity of the methods discussed in the mêlée of words or doubtfully luminous paradoxes, where truths, grotesquely caparisoned, met in conflict across the uproar of brawling judgments, of arbitrary decisions and folly, much as bullets, shells, and grapeshot are hurled across a battlefield.

It was at once a volume and a picture. Every philosophy, religion, and moral code differing so greatly in every latitude, every government, every great achievement of the human intellect, fell before a scythe as long as Time's own; and you might have found it hard to decide whether it was wielded by Gravity intoxicated, or by Inebriation grown sober and clear-sighted. Borne away by a kind of tempest, their minds, like the sea raging against the cliffs, seemed ready to shake the laws which confine the ebb and flow of civilization; unconsciously fulfilling the will of God, who has suffered evil and good to abide in nature, and reserved the secret of their continual strife to Himself. A frantic travesty of debate ensued,

a Walpurgis-revel of intellects. Between the dreary jests of these children of the Revolution over the inauguration of a newspaper, and the talk of the joyous gossips at Gargantua's birth, stretched the gulf that divides the nineteenth century from the sixteenth. Laughingly they had begun the work of destruction, and our journalists laughed amid the ruins.

"What is the name of that young man over there?" said the notary, indicating Raphael. "I thought I heard some one call him Valentin."

"What stuff is this?" said Émile, laughing; "plain Valentin, say you? Raphael *de* Valentin, if you please. We bear an eagle or, on a field sable, with a silver crown, beak, and claws gules, and a fine motto: NON CECIDIT ANIMUS. We are no foundling child, but a descendant of the Emperor Valens, of the stock of the Valentinois, founders of the cities of Valence in France, and Valencia in Spain, rightful heirs to the Empire of the East. If we suffer Mahmoud on the throne of Byzantium, it is out of pure condescension, and for lack of funds and soldiers."

With a fork flourished above Raphael's head, Émile outlined a crown upon it. The notary bethought himself a moment, but soon fell to drinking again, with a gesture peculiar to himself; it was quite impossible, it seemed to say, to secure in his clientèle the cities of Valence and Byzantium, the Emperor Valens, Mahmoud, and the house of Valentinois.

"Should not the destruction of those ant-hills, Babylon, Tyre, Carthage, and Venice, each crushed beneath the foot of a passing giant, serve as a warning to man, vouchsafed by some mocking power?" said Claude Vignon, who must play the Bossuet, as a sort of purchased slave, at the rate of fivepence a line.

"Perhaps Moses, Sylla, Louis XI., Richelieu, Robespierre, and Napoleon were but the same man who crosses our civilizations now and again, like a comet across the sky," said a disciple of Ballanche.

"Why try to fathom the designs of Providence?" said Canalis, maker of ballads.

"Come, now," said the man who set up for a critic, "there is nothing more elastic in the world than your Providence."

"Well, sir, Louis XIV. sacrificed more lives over digging the foundations of the Maintenon's aqueducts, than the Convention expended in order to assess the taxes justly, to make one law for everybody, and one nation of France, and to establish the rule of equal inheritance," said Massol, whom the lack of a syllable before his name had made a Republican.

"Are you going to leave our heads on our shoulders?" asked Moreau (of the Oise), a substantial farmer. "You, sir, who took blood for wine just now?"

"Where is the use? Aren't the principles of social order worth some sacrifices, sir?"

"Hi! Bixiou! What's-his-name, the Republican, considers a landowner's head a sacrifice!" said a young man to his neighbor.

"Men and events count for nothing," said the Republican, following out his theory in spite of hiccoughs; "in politics, as in philosophy, there are only principles and ideas."

"What an abomination! Then you would ruthlessly put your friends to death for a shibboleth?"

"Eh, sir! the man who feels compunction is your thorough scoundrel, for he has some notion of virtue; while Peter the Great and the Duke of Alva were embodied systems, and the pirate Monbard an organization."

"But can't society rid itself of your systems and organizations?" said Canalis.

"Oh, granted!" cried the Republican.

"That stupid Republic of yours makes me feel queasy. We sha'n't be able to carve a capon in peace, because we shall find the agrarian law inside it."

"Ah, my little Brutus, stuffed with truffles, your principles are all right enough. But you are like my valet, the rogue is so frightfully possessed with a mania for property that if I

left him to clean my clothes after his fashion, he would soon clean me out."

"Crass idiots!" replied the Republican, "you are for setting a nation straight with toothpicks. To your way of thinking, justice is more dangerous than thieves."

"Oh, dear!" cried the attorney Desroches.

"Aren't they a bore with their politics!" said the notary Cardot. "Shut up. That's enough of it. There is no knowledge nor virtue worth shedding a drop of blood for. If Truth were brought into liquidation, we might find her insolvent."

"It would be much less trouble, no doubt, to amuse ourselves with evil, rather than dispute about good. Moreover, I would give all the speeches made for forty years past at the Tribune for a trout, for one of Perrault's tales or Charlet's sketches."

"Quite right! . . . Hand me the asparagus. Because, after all, liberty begets anarchy, anarchy leads to despotism, and despotism back again to liberty. Millions have died without securing a triumph for any one system. Is not that the vicious circle in which the whole moral world revolves? Man believes that he has reached perfection, when in fact he has but re-arranged matters."

"Oh! oh!" cried Cursy, the *vaudevilliste;* "in that case, gentlemen, here's to Charles X., the father of liberty."

"Why not?" asked Émile. "When law becomes despotic, morals are relaxed, and *vice versa.*"

"Let us drink to the imbecility of authority, which gives us such an authority over imbeciles!" said the banker.

"Napoleon left us glory, at any rate, my good friend!" exclaimed a naval officer who had never left Brest.

"Glory is a poor bargain; you buy it dear, and it will not keep. Does not the egotism of the great take the form of glory, just as for nobodies it is their own well-being?"

"You are very fortunate, sir——"

"The first inventor of ditches must have been a weakling, for society is only useful to the puny. The savage and the

philosopher, at either extreme of the moral scale, hold property in equal horror."

"All very fine!" said Cardot; "but if there were no property, there would be no documents to draw up."

"These green peas are excessively delicious!"

"And the *curé* was found dead in his bed in the morning. . . ."

"Who is talking about death? Pray don't trifle, I have an uncle."

"Could you bear his loss with resignation?"

"No question."

"Gentlemen, listen to me! How to kill an uncle. Silence! (Cries of "Hush! hush") In the first place, take an uncle, large and stout, seventy years old at least, they are the best uncles. (Sensation.) Get him to eat a *pâté de foie gras,* any pretext will do."

"Ah, but my uncle is a thin, tall man, and very niggardly and abstemious."

"That sort of uncle is a monster; he misappropriates existence."

"Then," the speaker on uncles went on, "tell him, while he is digesting it, that his banker has failed."

"How if he bears up?"

"Let loose a pretty girl on him."

"And if——?" asked the other, with a shake of the head.

"Then he wouldn't be an uncle—an uncle is a gay dog by nature."

"Malibran has lost two notes in her voice."

"No, sir, she has not."

"Yes, sir, she has."

"Oh, ho! No and yes, is not that the sum-up of all religious, political, or literary dissertations? Man is a clown dancing on the edge of an abyss."

"You would make out that I am a fool."

"On the contrary, you cannot make me out."

"Education, there's a pretty piece of tomfoolery. M. Heineffettermach estimates the number of printed volumes

at more than a thousand millions; and a man cannot read more than a hundred and fifty thousand in his lifetime. So, just tell me what that word *education* means. For some it consists in knowing the names of Alexander's horse, of the dog Bérécillo, of the Seigneur d'Accords, and in ignorance of the man to whom we owe the discovery of rafting and the manufacture of porcelain. For others it is the knowledge how to burn a will and live respected, be looked up to and popular, instead of stealing a watch with half-a-dozen aggravating circumstances, after a previous conviction, and so perishing, hated and dishonored, in the Place de Grève."

"Will Nathan's work live?"

"He has very clever collaborators, sir."

"Or Canalis?"

"He is a great man; let us say no more about him."

"You are all drunk!"

"The consequence of a Constitution is the immediate stultification of intellects. Art, science, public works, everything, is consumed by a horribly egoistic feeling, the leprosy of the time. Three hundred of your bourgeoisie, set down on benches, will only think of planting poplars. Tyranny does great things lawlessly, while Liberty will scarcely trouble herself to do petty ones lawfully."

"Your reciprocal instruction will turn out counters in human flesh," broke in an Absolutist. "All individuality will disappear in a people brought to a dead level by education."

"For all that, is not the aim of society to secure happiness to each member of it?" asked the Saint-Simonian.

"If you had an income of fifty thousand livres, you would not think much about the people. If you are smitten with a tender passion for the race, go to Madagascar; there you will find a nice little nation all ready to Saint-Simonize, classify, and cork up in your phials, but here every one fits into his niche like a peg in a hole. A porter is a porter, and a blockhead is a fool, without a college of fathers to promote them to those positions."

"You are a Carlist."

"And why not? Despotism pleases me; it implies a certain contempt for the human race. I have no animosity against kings, they are so amusing. Is it nothing to sit enthroned in a room, at a distance of thirty million leagues from the sun?"

"Let us once more take a broad view of civilization," said the man of learning who, for the benefit of the inattentive sculptor, had opened a discussion on primitive society and autochthonous races. "The vigor of a nation in its origin was in a way physical, unitary, and crude; then as aggregations increased, government advanced by a decomposition of the primitive rule, more or less skilfully managed. For example, in remote ages national strength lay in theocracy, the priest held both sword and censer; a little later there were two priests, the pontiff and the king. To-day our society, the latest word of civilization, has distributed power according to the number of combinations, and we come to the forces called business, thought, money, and eloquence. Authority thus divided is steadily approaching a social dissolution, with interest as its one opposing barrier. We depend no longer on either religion or physical force, but upon intellect. Can a book replace the sword? Can discussion be a substitute for action? That is the question."

"Intellect has made an end of everything," cried the Carlist. "Come, now! Absolute freedom has brought about national suicides; their triumph left them as listless as an English millionaire."

"Won't you tell us something new? You have made fun of authority of all sorts to-day, which is every bit as vulgar as denying the existence of God. So you have no belief left, and the century is like an old Sultan worn out by debauchery! Your Byron, in short, sings of crime and its emotions in a final despair of poetry."

"Don't you know," replied Bianchon, quite drunk by this time, "that a dose of phosphorus more or less makes the man of genius or the scoundrel, a clever man or an idiot, a virtuous person or a criminal?"

"Can any one treat of virtue thus?" cried Cursy. "Virtue, the subject of every drama at the theatre, the *denoûment* of every play, the foundation of every court of law." . . .

"Be quiet, you ass. You are an Achilles for virtue, without his heel," said Bixiou.

"Some drink!"

"What will you bet that I will drink a bottle of champagne like a flash, at one pull?"

"What a flash of wit!"

"Drunk as lords," muttered a young man gravely, trying to give some wine to his waistcoat.

"Yes, sir; real government is the art of ruling by public opinion."

"Opinion? That is the most vicious jade of all. According to you moralists and politicians, the laws you set up are always to go before those of nature, and opinion before conscience. You are right and wrong both. Suppose society bestows down pillows on us, that benefit is made up for by the gout; and justice is likewise tempered by red-tape, and colds accompany cashmere shawls."

"Wretch!" Émile broke in upon the misanthrope, "how can you slander civilization here at table, up to the eyes in wines and exquisite dishes? Eat away at that roebuck with the gilded horns and feet, and do not carp at your mother. . ."

"Is it any fault of mine if Catholicism puts a million deities in a sack of flour, that Republics will end in a Napoleon, that monarchy dwells between the assassination of Henry IV. and the trial of Louis XVI., and Liberalism produces Lafayettes?"

"Didn't you embrace him in July?"

"No."

"Then hold your tongue, you sceptic."

"Sceptics are the most conscientious of men."

"They have no conscience."

"What are you saying? They have two apiece at least!"

"So you want to discount heaven, a thoroughly commercial

notion. Ancient religions were but the unchecked development of physical pleasure, but we have developed a soul and expectations; some advance has been made."

"What can you expect, my friends, of a century filled with politics to repletion?" asked Nathan. "What befell *The History of the King of Bohemia and his Seven Castles,* a most entrancing conception? . . ."

"I say," the would-be critic cried down the whole length of the table. "The phrases might have been drawn at haphazard from a hat, 'twas a work written 'down to Charenton.' "

"You are a fool!"

"And you are a rogue!"

"Oh! oh!"

"Ah! ah!"

"They are going to fight."

"No, they aren't."

"You will find me to-morrow, sir."

"This very moment," Nathan answered.

"Come, come, you pair of fire-eaters!"

"You are another!" said the prime mover in the quarrel.

"They can hardly stand on their legs."

"Ah, I can't stand upright, perhaps?" asked the pugnacious Nathan, straightening himself up like a stag-beetle about to fly.

He stared stupidly round the table, then completely exhausted by the effort, sank back into his chair, and mutely hung his head.

"Would it not have been nice," the critic said to his neighbor, "to fight about a book I have neither read nor seen?"

"Émile, look out for your coat, your neighbor is growing pale," said Bixiou.

"Kant? Yet another ball flung out for fools to sport with, sir! Materialism and spiritualism are a fine pair of battledores with which charlatans in long gowns keep a shuttlecock a-going. Suppose that God is everywhere, as Spinoza says, or that all things proceed from God, as says St. Paul . . .

the nincompoops, the door shuts or opens, but isn't the movement the same? Does the fowl come from the egg, or the egg from the fowl? . . . Just hand me some duck . . . and there, you have all science."

"Simpleton!" cried the man of science, "your problem is settled by fact!"

"What fact!"

"Professors' chairs were not made for philosophy, but philosophy for the professors' chairs. Put on a pair of spectacles and read the budget."

"Thieves!"

"Nincompoops!"

"Knaves!"

"Gulls!"

"Where but in Paris will you find such a ready and rapid exchange of thought?" cried Bixiou in a deep, bass voice.

"Bixiou! Act a classical farce for us! Come, now."

"Would you like me to depict the nineteenth century?"

"Silence."

"Pay attention."

"Clap a muffle on your trumpets."

"Shut up, you Turk!"

"Give him some wine, and let that fellow keep quiet."

"Now, then, Bixiou!"

The artist buttoned his black coat to the collar, put on yellow gloves, and began to burlesque the *Revue des Deux Mondes* by acting a squinting old lady; but the uproar drowned his voice, and no one heard a word of the satire. Still, if he did not catch the spirit of the century, he represented the *Revue* at any rate, for his own intentions were not very clear to him.

Dessert was served as if by magic. A huge epergne of gilded bronze from Thomire's studio overshadowed the table. Tall statuettes, which a celebrated artist had endued with ideal beauty according to conventional European notions, sustained and carried pyramids of strawberries, pines, fresh dates, golden grapes, clear-skinned peaches, oranges brought

from Setubal by steamer, pomegranates, Chinese fruit; in short, all the surprises of luxury, miracles of confectionery, the most tempting dainties, and choicest delicacies. The coloring of this epicurean work of art was enhanced by the splendors of porcelain, by sparkling outlines of gold, by the chasing of the vases. Poussin's landscapes, copied on Sèvres ware, were crowned with graceful fringes of moss, green, translucent, and fragile as ocean weeds.

The revenue of a German prince would not have defrayed the cost of this arrogant display. Silver and mother-of-pearl, gold and crystal, were lavished afresh in new forms; but scarcely a vague idea of this almost Oriental fairyland penetrated eyes now heavy with wine, or crossed the delirium of intoxication. The fire and fragrance of the wines acted like potent philters and magical fumes, producing a kind of mirage in the brain, binding feet, and weighing down hands. The pyramids of fruit were ransacked, voices grew thicker, the clamor increased. Words were no longer distinct, glasses flew in pieces, senseless peals of laughter broke out. Cursy snatched up a horn and struck up a flourish on it. It acted like a signal given by the devil. Yells, hisses, songs, cries, and groans went up from the maddened crew. You might have smiled to see men, light-hearted by nature, grow tragical as Crébillon's dramas, and pensive as a sailor in a coach Hard-headed men blabbed secrets to the inquisitive, who were long past heeding them. Saturnine faces were wreathed in smiles worthy of a pirouetting dancer. Claude Vignon shuffled about like a bear in a cage. Intimate friends began to fight.

Animal likenesses, so curiously traced by physiologists in human faces, came out in gestures and behavior. A book lay open for a Bichat if he had repaired thither fasting and collected. The master of the house, knowing his condition, did not dare to stir, but encouraged his guests' extravagances with a fixed grimacing smile, meant to be hospitable and appropriate. His large face, turning from blue and red to a

purple shade terrible to see, partook of the general commotion by movements like the heaving and pitching of a brig.

"Now, did you murder them?" Émile asked him.

"Capital punishment is going to be abolished, they say, in favor of the Revolution of July," answered Taillefer, raising his eyebrows with drunken sagacity.

"Don't they rise up before you in dreams at times?" Raphael persisted.

"There's a statute of limitations," said the murderer —Crœsus.

"And on his tombstone," Émile began, with a sardonic laugh, "the stonemason will carve 'Passer-by, accord a tear, in memory of one that's here!' Oh," he continued, "I would cheerfully pay a hundred sous to any mathematician who would prove the existence of hell to me by an algebraical equation."

He flung up a coin and cried:

"Heads for the existence of God!"

"Don't look!" Raphael cried, pouncing upon it. "Who knows? Suspense is so pleasant."

"Unluckily," Émile said, with burlesque melancholy, "I can see no halting-place between the unbeliever's arithmetic and the papal *Pater noster.* Pshaw! let us drink. *Trinq* was, I believe, the oracular answer of the *dive bouteille* and the final conclusion of Pantagruel."

"We owe our arts and monuments to the *Pater noster,* and our knowledge, too, perhaps; and a still greater benefit—modern government—whereby a vast and teeming society is wondrously represented by some five hundred intellects. It neutralizes opposing forces and gives free play to CIVILIZATION, that Titan queen who has succeeded the ancient terrible figure of the KING, that sham Providence, reared by man between himself and heaven. In the face of such achievements, atheism seems like a barren skeleton. What do you say?"

"I am thinking of the seas of blood shed by Catholicism," Émile replied, quite unimpressed. "It has drained our hearts and veins dry to make a mimic deluge. No matter! Every

man who thinks must range himself beneath the banner of Christ, for He alone has consummated the triumph of spirit over matter; He alone has revealed to us, like a poet, an intermediate world that separates us from the Deity."

"Believest thou?" asked Raphael with an unaccountable drunken smile. "Very good; we must not commit ourselves; so we will drink the celebrated toast, *Diis ignotis!*"

And they drained the chalice filled up with science, carbonic acid gas, perfumes, poetry, and incredulity.

"If the gentlemen will go to the drawing-room, coffee is ready for them," said the major-domo.

There was scarcely one of those present whose mind was not floundering by this time in the delights of chaos, where every spark of intelligence is quenched, and the body, set free from its tyranny, gives itself up to the frenetic joys of liberty. Some who had arrived at the apogee of intoxication were dejected, as they painfully tried to arrest a single thought which might assure them of their own existence; others, deep in the heavy morasses of indigestion, denied the possibility of movement. The noisy and the silent were oddly assorted.

For all that, when new joys were announced to them by the stentorian tones of the servant, who spoke on his master's behalf, they all rose, leaning upon, dragging or carrying one another. But on the threshold of the room the entire crew paused for a moment, motionless, as if fascinated. The intemperate pleasures of the banquet seemed to fade away at this titillating spectacle, prepared by their amphitryon to appeal to the most sensual of their instincts.

Beneath the shining wax-lights in a golden chandelier, round about a table inlaid with gilded metal, a group of women, whose eyes shone like diamonds, suddenly met the stupefied stare of the revelers. Their toilettes were splendid, but less magnificent than their beauty, which eclipsed the other marvels of this palace. A light shone from their eyes, bewitching as those of sirens, more brilliant and ardent than the blaze that streamed down upon the snowy marble, the

delicately carved surfaces of bronze, and lit up the satin sheen of the tapestry. The contrasts of their attitudes and the slight movements of their heads, each differing in character and nature of attraction, set the heart afire. It was like a thicket, where blossoms mingled with rubies, sapphires, and coral; a combination of gossamer scarves that flickered like beacon-lights; of black ribbons about snowy throats; of gorgeous turbans and demurely enticing apparel. It was a seraglio that appealed to every eye, and fulfilled every fancy. Each form posed to admiration was scarcely concealed by the folds of cashmere, and half hidden, half revealed by transparent gauze and diaphanous silk. The little slender feet were eloquent, though the fresh red lips uttered no sound.

Demure and fragile-looking girls, pictures of maidenly innocence, with a semblance of conventional unction about their heads, were there like apparitions that a breath might dissipate. Aristocratic beauties with haughty glances; languid, flexible, slender, and complaisant, bent their heads as though there were royal protectors still in the market. An Englishwoman seemed like a spirit of melancholy—some coy, pale, shadowy form among Ossian's mists, or a type of remorse flying from crime. The Parisienne was not wanting in all her beauty that consists in an indescribable charm; armed with her irresistible weakness, vain of her costume and her wit, pliant and hard, a heartless, passionless siren that yet can create factitious treasures of passion and counterfeit emotion.

Italians shone in the throng, serene and self-possessed in their bliss; handsome Normans, with splendid figures; women of the south, with black hair and well-shaped eyes. Lebel might have summoned together all the fair women of Versailles, who since morning had perfected all their wiles, and now came like a troupe of Oriental women, bidden by the slave merchant to be ready to set out at dawn. They stood disconcerted and confused about the table, huddled together in a murmuring group like bees in a hive. The combination of timid embarrassment with coquettishness and a sort of

expostulation was the result either of calculated effect or a spontaneous modesty. Perhaps a sentiment of which women are never utterly divested prescribed to them the cloak of modesty to heighten and enhance the charms of wantonness. So the venerable Taillefer's designs seemed on the point of collapse, for these unbridled natures were subdued from the very first by the majesty with which woman is invested. There was a murmur of admiration, which vibrated like a soft musical note. Wine had not taken love for traveling companion; instead of a violent tumult of passions, the guests thus taken by surprise, in a moment of weakness, gave themselves up to luxurious raptures of delight.

Artists obeyed the voice of poetry which constrains them, and studied with pleasure the different delicate tints of these chosen examples of beauty. Sobered by a thought perhaps due to some emanation from a bubble of carbonic acid in the champagne, a philosopher shuddered at the misfortunes which had brought these women, once perhaps worthy of the truest devotion, to this. Each one doubtless could have unfolded a cruel tragedy. Infernal tortures followed in the train of most of them, and they drew after them faithless men, broken vows, and pleasures atoned for in wretchedness. Polite advances were made by the guests, and conversations began, as varied in character as the speakers. They broke up into groups. It might have been a fashionable drawing-room where ladies and young girls offer after dinner the assistance that coffee, liqueurs, and sugar afford to diners who are struggling in the toils of a perverse digestion. But in a little while laughter broke out, the murmur grew, and voices were raised. The saturnalia, subdued for a moment, threatened at times to renew itself. The alternations of sound and silence bore a distant resemblance to a symphony of Beethoven's.

The two friends, seated on a silken divan, were first approached by a tall, well-proportioned girl of stately bearing; her features were irregular, but her face was striking and vehement in expression, and impressed the mind by the vigor of its contrasts. Her dark hair fell in luxuriant curls, with

which some hand seemed to have played havoc already, for the locks fell lightly over the splendid shoulders that thus attracted attention. The long brown curls half hid her queenly throat, though where the light fell upon it, the delicacy of its fine outlines was revealed. Her warm and vivid coloring was set off by the dead white of her complexion. Bold and ardent glances came from under the long eyelashes; the damp, red, half-open lips challenged a kiss. Her frame was strong but compliant; with a bust and arms strongly developed, as in figures drawn by the Caracci, she yet seemed active and elastic, with a panther's strength and suppleness, and in the same way the energetic grace of her figure suggested fierce pleasures.

But though she might romp perhaps and laugh, there was something terrible in her eyes and her smile. Like a pythoness possessed by the demon, she inspired awe rather than pleasure. All changes, one after another, flashed like lightning over every mobile feature of her face. She might captivate a jaded fancy, but a young man would have feared her. She was like some colossal statue fallen from the height of a Greek temple, so grand when seen afar, too roughly hewn to be seen anear. And yet, in spite of all, her terrible beauty could have stimulated exhaustion; her voice might charm the deaf; her glances might put life into the bones of the dead; and therefore Émile was vaguely reminded of one of Shakespeare's tragedies—a wonderful maze, in which joy groans, and there is something wild even about love, and the magic of forgiveness and the warmth of happiness succeed to cruel storms of rage. She was a siren that can both kiss and devour; laugh like a devil, or weep as angels can. She could concentrate in one instant all a woman's powers of attraction in a single effort (the sighs of melancholy and the charms of maiden's shyness alone excepted), then in a moment rise in fury like a nation in revolt, and tear herself, her passion, and her lover, in pieces.

Dressed in red velvet, she trampled under her reckless feet the stray flowers fallen from other heads, and held out a

salver to the two friends, with careless hands. The white arms stood out in bold relief against the velvet. Proud of her beauty; proud (who knows?) of her corruption, she stood like a queen of pleasure, like an incarnation of enjoyment; the enjoyment that comes of squandering the accumulations of three generations; that scoffs at its progenitors, and makes merry over a corpse; that will dissolve pearls and wreck thrones, turn old men into boys, and make young men prematurely old; enjoyment only possible to giants weary of their power, tormented by reflection, or for whom strife has become a plaything.

"What is your name?" asked Raphael.

"Aquilina."

"Out of *Venice Preserved!*" exclaimed Émile.

"Yes," she answered. "Just as a pope takes a new name when he is exalted above all other men, I, too, took another name when I raised myself above women's level."

"Then have you, like your patron saint, a terrible and noble lover, a conspirator, who would die for you?" cried Émile eagerly—this gleam of poetry had aroused his interest.

"Once I had," she answered. "But I had a rival too in La Guillotine. I have worn something red about me ever since, lest any happiness should carry me away."

"Oh, if you are going to get her on to the story of those four lads of La Rochelle, she will never get to the end of it. That's enough, Aquilina. As if every woman could not bewail some lover or other, though not every one has the luck to lose him on the scaffold, as you have done. I would a great deal sooner see a lover of mine in a trench at the back of Clamart than in a rival's arms."

All this in the gentlest and most melodious accents, and pronounced by the prettiest, gentlest, and most innocent-looking little person that a fairy wand ever drew from an enchanted eggshell. She had come up noiselessly, and they became aware of a slender, dainty figure, charmingly timid blue eyes, and white transparent brows. No *ingénue* among the naiads, a truant from her river spring, could have been

shyer, whiter, more ingenuous than this young girl, seemingly about sixteen years old, ignorant of evil and of the storms of life, and fresh from some church in which she must have prayed the angels to call her to heaven before the time, Only in Paris are such natures as this to be found, concealing depths of depravity behind a fair mask, and the most artificial vices beneath a brow as young and fair as an opening flower.

At first the angelic promise of those soft lineaments misled the friends. Raphael and Émile took the coffee which she poured into the cups brought by Aquilina, and began to talk with her. In the eyes of the two poets she soon became transformed into some sombre allegory, of I know not what aspect of human life. She opposed to the vigorous and ardent expression of her commanding acquaintance a revelation of heartless corruption and voluptuous cruelty. Heedless enough to perpetrate a crime, hardy enough to feel no misgivings; a pitiless demon that wrings larger and kinder natures with torments that it is incapable of knowing, that simpers over a traffic in love, sheds tears over a victim's funeral, and beams with joy over the reading of the will. A poet might have admired the magnificent Aquilina; but the winning Euphrasia must be repulsive to every one—the first was the soul of sin; the second, sin without a soul in it.

"I should dearly like to know," Émile remarked to this pleasing being, "if you ever reflect upon your future?"

"My future!" she answered with a laugh. "What do you mean by my future? Why should I think about something that does not exist as yet? I never look before or behind. Isn't one day at a time more than I can concern myself with as it is? And besides, the future, as we know, means the hospital."

"How can you foresee a future in the hospital, and make no effort to avert it?"

"What is there so alarming about the hospital?" asked the terrific Aquilina. "When we are neither wives nor mothers, when old age draws black stockings over our limbs, sets

wrinkles on our brows, withers up the woman in us, and darkens the light in our lover's eyes, what could we need when that comes to pass? You would look on us then as mere human clay; we with our habiliments shall be for you like so much mud—worthless, lifeless, crumbling to pieces, going about with the rustle of dead leaves. Rags or the daintiest finery will be as one to us then; the ambergris of the boudoir will breathe an odor of death and dry bones; and suppose there is a heart there in that mud, not one of you but would make mock of it, not so much as a memory will you spare to us. Is not our existence precisely the same whether we live in a fine mansion with lap-dogs to tend, or sort rags in a workhouse? Does it make much difference whether we shall hide our gray heads beneath lace or a handkerchief striped with blue and red; whether we sweep a crossing with a birch broom, or the steps of the Tuileries with satins; whether we sit beside a gilded hearth, or cower over the ashes in a red earthen pot; whether we go to the Opera or look on in the Place de Grève?"

"*Aquilina mia,* you have never shown more sense than in this depressing fit of yours," Euphrasia remarked. "Yes, cashmere, *point d'Alençon,* perfumes, gold, silks, luxury, everything that sparkles, everything pleasant, belongs to youth alone. Time alone may show us our folly, but good fortune will acquit us. You are laughing at me," she went on, with a malicious glance at the friends; "but am I not right? I would sooner die of pleasure than of illness. I am not afflicted with a mania for perpetuity, nor have I a great veneration for human nature, such as God has made it. Give me millions, and I would squander them; I should not keep one centime for the year to come. Live to be charming and have power, that is the decree of my every heartbeat. Society sanctions my life; does it not pay for my extravagances? Why does Providence pay me every morning my income, which I spend every evening? Why are hospitals built for us? And Providence did not put good and evil on either hand for us to select what tires and pains us. I should be very foolish if I did not amuse myself."

"And how about others?" asked Émile.

"Others? Oh, well, they must manage for themselves. I prefer laughing at their woes to weeping over my own. I defy any man to give me the slightest uneasiness."

"What have you suffered to make you think like this?" asked Raphael.

"I myself have been forsaken for an inheritance," she said, striking an attitude that displayed all her charms; "and yet I had worked night and day to keep my lover! I am not to be gulled by any smile or vow, and I have set myself to make one long entertainment of my life."

"But does not happiness come from the soul within?" cried Raphael.

"It may be so," Aquilina answered; "but is it nothing to be conscious of admiration and flattery; to triumph over other women, even over the most virtuous, humiliating them before our beauty and our splendor? Not only so; one day of our life is worth ten years of a *bourgeoise* existence, and so it is all summed up."

"Is not a woman hateful without virtue?" Émile said to Raphael.

Euphrasia's glance was like a viper's, as she said with an irony in her voice that cannot be rendered:

"Virtue! we leave that to deformity and to ugly women. What would the poor things be without it?"

"Hush, be quiet," Émile broke in. "Don't talk about something you have never known."

"That I have never known!" Euphrasia answered. "You give yourself for life to some person you abominate; you must bring up children who will neglect you, who wound your very heart, and you must say, 'Thank you!' for it; and these are the virtues you prescribe to woman. And that is not enough. By way of requiting her self-denial, you must come and add to her sorrows by trying to lead her astray; and though you are rebuffed, she is compromised. A nice life! How far better to keep one's freedom, to follow one's inclinations in love, and die young."

"Have you no fear of the price to be paid some day for all this?"

"Even then," she said, "instead of mingling pleasures and troubles, my life will consist of two separate parts—a youth of happiness is secure, and there may come a hazy, uncertain old age, during which I can suffer at my leisure."

"She has never loved," came in the deep tones of Aquilina's voice. "She never went a hundred leagues to drink in one look and a denial with untold raptures. She has not hung her own life on a thread, nor tried to stab more than one man to save her sovereign lord, her king, her divinity. . . . Love, for her, meant a fascinating colonel."

"Here she is with her La Rochelle," Euphrasia made answer. "Love comes like the wind, no one knows whence. And, for that matter, if one of those brutes had once fallen in love with you, you would hold sensible men in horror."

"Brutes are put out of the question by the Code," said the tall, sarcastic Aquilina.

"I thought you had more kindness for the army," laughed Euphrasia.

"How happy they are in their power of dethroning their reason in this way," Raphael exclaimed.

"Happy?" asked Aquilina, with a dreadful look, and a smile full of pity and terror. "Ah, you do not know what it is to be condemned to a life of pleasure, with your dead hidden in your heart. . . ."

A moment's consideration of the rooms was like a foretaste of Milton's Pandemonium. The faces of those still capable of drinking were a hideous blue tint, from burning draughts of punch. Mad dances were kept up with wild energy, excited laughter and outcries broke out like the explosion of fireworks. The boudoir and a small adjoining room were strewn like a battlefield with the insensible and incapable. Wine, pleasure, and dispute had heated the atmosphere. Wine and love, delirium and unconsciousness possessed them, and were written upon all faces, upon the furniture; were expressed by the surrounding disorder, and brought light

films over the vision of those assembled, so that the air seemed full of intoxicating vapor. A glittering dust arose, as in the luminous paths made by a ray of sunlight, the most bizarre forms flitted through it, grotesque struggles were seen athwart it. Groups of interlaced figures blended with the white marbles, the noble masterpieces of sculpture that adorned the rooms.

Though the two friends yet preserved a sort of fallacious clearness in their ideas and voices, a feeble appearance and faint thrill of animation, it was yet almost impossible to distinguish what was real among the fantastic absurdities before them, or what foundation there was for the impossible pictures that passed unceasingly before their weary eyes. The strangest phenomena of dreams beset them, the lowering heavens, the fervid sweetness caught by faces in our visions, and unheard-of agility under a load of chains,—all these so vividly, that they took the pranks of the orgy about them for the freaks of some nightmare in which all movement is silent, and cries never reach the ear. The *valet de chambre* succeeded just then, after some little difficulty, in drawing his master into the ante-chamber to whisper to him:

"The neighbors are all at their windows, complaining of the racket, sir."

"If noise alarms them, why don't they lay down straw before their doors?" was Taillefer's rejoinder.

Raphael's sudden burst of laughter was so unseasonable and abrupt, that his friend demanded the reason of his unseemly hilarity.

"You will hardly understand me," he replied. "In the first place, I must admit that you stopped me on the Quai Voltaire just as I was about to throw myself into the Seine, and you would like to know, no doubt, my motives for dying. And when I proceed to tell you that by an almost miraculous chance the most poetic memorials of the material world had but just then been summed up for me as a symbolical interpretation of human wisdom; whilst at this minute the remains of all the intellectual treasures ravaged by us at table

are comprised in these two women, the living and authentic types of folly, would you be any the wiser? Our profound apathy towards men and things supplied the half-tones in a crudely contrasted picture of two theories of life so diametrically opposed. If you were not drunk, you might perhaps catch a gleam of philosophy in this."

"And if you had not both feet on that fascinating Aquilina, whose heavy breathing suggests an analogy with the sounds of a storm about to burst," replied Émile, absently engaged in the harmless amusement of winding and unwinding Euphrasia's hair, "you would be ashamed of your inebriated garrulity. Both your systems can be packed in a phrase, and reduced to a single idea. The mere routine of living brings a stupid kind of wisdom with it, by blunting our intelligence with work; and on the other hand, a life passed in the limbo of the abstract or in the abysses of the moral world, produces a sort of wisdom run mad. The conditions may be summed up in brief; we may extinguish emotion, and so live to old age, or we may choose to die young as martyrs to contending passions. And yet this decree is at variance with the temperaments with which we were endowed by the bitter jester who modeled all creatures."

"Idiot!" Raphael burst in. "Go on epitomizing yourself after that fashion, and you will fill volumes. If I attempted to formulate those two ideas clearly, I might as well say that man is corrupted by the exercise of his wits, and purified by ignorance. You are calling the whole fabric of society to account. But whether we live with the wise or perish with the fool, isn't the result the same sooner or later? And have not the prime constituents of the quintessence of both systems been before expressed in a couple of words—*Carymary, Carymara.*"

"You make me doubt the existence of a God, for your stupidity is greater than His power," said Émile. "Our beloved Rabelais summed it all up in a shorter word than your '*Carymary, Carymara;*' from his *Peut-être* Montaigne derived his own *Que sais-je?* After all, this last word of moral science is scarcely more than the cry of Pyrrhus set

betwixt good and evil, or Buridan's ass between the two measures of oats. But let this everlasting question alone, resolved to-day by a 'Yes' and a 'No.' What experience did you look to find by a jump into the Seine? Were you jealous of the hydraulic machine on the Pont Nôtre Dame?"

"Ah, if you but knew my history!"

"Pooh," said Émile; "I did not think you could be so commonplace; that remark is hackneyed. Don't you know that every one of us claims to have suffered as no other ever did?"

"Ah!" Raphael sighed.

"What a mountebank art thou with thy 'Ah'! Look here, now. Does some disease of mind or body, by contracting your muscles, bring back of a morning the wild horses that tear you in pieces at night, as with Damiens once upon a time? Were you driven to sup off your own dog in a garret, uncooked and without salt? Have your children ever cried, I am hungry'? Have you sold your mistress' hair to hazard the money at play? Have you ever drawn a sham bill of exchange on a fictitious uncle at a sham address, and feared lest you should not be in time to take it up? Come now, I am attending! If you were going to drown yourself for some woman, or by way of a protest, or out of sheer dulness, I disown you. Make your confession, and no lies! I don't at all want a historical memoir. And, above all things, be as concise as your clouded intellect permits; I am as critical as a professor, and as sleepy as a woman at her vespers."

"You silly fool!" said Raphael. "When has not suffering been keener for a more susceptible nature? Some day when science has attained to a pitch that enables us to study the natural history of hearts, when they are named and classified in genera, sub-genera, and families; into crustaceæ, fossils, saurians, infusoria, or whatever it is,—then, my dear fellow, it will be ascertained that there are natures as tender and fragile as flowers, that are broken by the slight bruises that some stony hearts do not even feel——"

"For pity's sake, spare me thy exordium," said Émile, as, half plaintive, half amused, he took Raphael's hand.

II

A WOMAN WITHOUT A HEART

After a moment's silence, Raphael said with a careless gesture:

"Perhaps it is an effect of the fumes of punch—I really cannot tell—this clearness of mind that enables me to comprise my whole life in a single picture, where figures and hues, lights, shades, and half-tones are faithfully rendered. I should not have been so surprised at this poetical play of imagination if it were not accompanied with a sort of scorn for my past joys and sorrows. Seen from afar, my life appears to contract by some mental process. That long, slow agony of ten years' duration can be brought to memory today in some few phrases, in which pain is resolved into a mere idea, and pleasure becomes a philosophical reflection. Instead of feeling things, I weigh and consider them——"

"You are as tiresome as the explanation of an amendment," cried Émile.

"Very likely," said Raphael submissively. "I spare you the first seventeen years of my life for fear of abusing a listener's patience. Till that time, like you and thousands of others, I had lived my life at school or the *lycée,* with its imaginary troubles and genuine happinesses, which are so pleasant to look back upon. Our jaded palates still crave for that Lenten fare, so long as we have not tried it afresh. It was a pleasant life, with the tasks that we thought so contemptible, but which taught us application for all that. . . ."

"Let the drama begin," said Émile, half-plaintively, half-comically.

"When I left school," Raphael went on, with a gesture that claimed the right of speaking, "my father submitted me to a strict discipline; he installed me in a room near his own

study, and I had to rise at five in the morning and be in bed by nine at night. He meant me to take my law studies seriously. I attended the Schools, and read with an advocate as well, but my lectures and work were so narrowly circumscribed by the laws of time and space, and my father required such a strict account of my doings, at dinner, that . . ."

"What is this to me?" asked Émile.

"The devil take you!" said Raphael. "How are you to enter into my feelings if I do not relate the facts that insensibly shaped my character, made me timid, and prolonged the period of youthful simplicity? In this manner I cowered under as strict a despotism as a monarch's till I came of age. To depict the tedium of my life, it will be perhaps enough to portray my father to you. He was tall, thin, and slight, with a hatchet face, and pale complexion; a man of few words, fidgety as an old maid, exacting as a senior clerk. His paternal solicitude hovered over my merriment and gleeful thoughts, and seemed to cover them with a leaden pall. Any effusive demonstration on my part was received by him as a childish absurdity, I was far more afraid of him than I had been of any of our masters at school.

"I seem to see him before me at this moment. In his chestnut-brown frock-coat he looked like a red herring wrapped up in the cover of a pamphlet, and he held himself as erect as an Easter candle. But I was fond of my father, and at heart he was right enough. Perhaps we never hate severity when it has its source in greatness of character and pure morals, and is skilfully tempered with kindness. My father, it is true, never left me a moment to myself, and only when I was twenty years old gave me so much as ten francs of my own, ten knavish prodigals of francs, such a hoard as I had long vainly desired, which set me a-dreaming of unutterable felicity; yet, for all that, he sought to procure relaxations for me. When he had promised me a treat beforehand, he would take me to Les Bouffons, or to a concert or ball, where I hoped to find a mistress. . . . A

mistress! that meant independence. But bashful and timid as I was, knowing nobody, and ignorant of the dialect of drawing-rooms, I always came back as awkward as ever, and swelling with unsatisfied desires, to be put in harness like a troop horse next day by my father, and to return with morning to my advocate, the Palais de Justice, and the law. To have swerved from the straight course which my father had mapped out for me, would have drawn down his wrath upon me; at my first delinquency, he threatened to ship me off as a cabin-boy to the Antilles. A dreadful shiver ran through me if I had ventured to spend a couple of hours in some pleasure party.

"Imagine the most wandering imagination and passionate temperament, the tenderest soul and most artistic nature, dwelling continually in the presence of the most flint-hearted, atrabilious, and frigid man on earth; think of me as a young girl married to a skeleton, and you will understand the life whose curious scenes can only be a hearsay tale to you; the plans for running away that perished at the sight of my father, the despair soothed by slumber, the dark broodings charmed away by music. I breathed my sorrows forth in melodies. Beethoven or Mozart would keep my confidences sacred. Nowadays, I smile at recollections of the scruples which burdened my conscience at that epoch of innocence and virtue.

"If I set foot in a restaurant, I gave myself up for lost; my fancy led me to look on a café as a disreputable haunt, where men lost their characters and embarrassed their fortunes; as for engaging in play, I had not the money to risk. Oh, if I needed to send you to sleep, I would tell you about one of the most frightful pleasures of my life, one of those pleasures with fangs that bury themselves in the heart as the branding-iron enters the convict's shoulder. I was at a ball at the house of the Duc de Navarreins, my father's cousin. But to make my position the more perfectly clear, you must know that I wore a threadbare coat, ill-fitting shoes, a tie fit for a stableman, and a soiled pair of gloves. I shrank into a

corner to eat ices and watch the pretty faces at my leisure. My father noticed me. Actuated by some motive that I did not fathom, so dumfounded was I by this act of confidence, he handed me his keys and purse to keep. Ten paces away some men were gambling. I heard the rattling of gold; I was twenty years old; I longed to be steeped for one whole day in the follies of my time of life. It was a license of the imagination that would find a parallel neither in the freaks of courtesans, nor in the dreams of young girls. For a year past I had beheld myself well dressed, in a carriage, with a pretty woman by my side, playing the great lord, dining at Véry's, deciding not to go back home till the morrow; but was prepared for my father with a plot more intricate than the Marriage of Figaro, which he could not possibly have unraveled. All this bliss would cost, I estimated, fifty crowns. Was it not the artless idea of playing truant that still had charms for me?

"I went into a small adjoining room, and when alone counted my father's money with smarting eyes and trembling fingers—a hundred crowns! The joys of my escapade rose before me at the thought of the amount; joys that flitted about me like Macbeth's witches round their caldron; joys how alluring! how thrilling! how delicious! I became a deliberate rascal. I heeded neither my tingling ears nor the violent beating of my heart, but took out two twenty-franc pieces that I seem to see yet. The dates had been erased, and Bonaparte's head simpered upon them. After I had put back the purse in my pocket, I returned to a gaming-table with the two pieces of gold in the palms of my damp hands, prowling about the players like a sparrow-hawk round a coop of chickens. Tormented by inexpressible terror, I flung a sudden clairvoyant glance round me, and feeling quite sure that I was seen by none of my acquaintance, betted on a stout, jovial little man, heaping upon his head more prayers and vows than are put up during two or three storms at sea. Then, with an intuitive scoundrelism, or Machiavelism, surprising in one of my age, I went and stood in the door,

and looked about me in the rooms, though I saw nothing; for both mind and eyes hovered about that fateful green cloth.

"That evening fixes the date of a first observation of a physiological kind; to it I owe a kind of insight into certain mysteries of our double nature that I have since been enabled to penetrate. I had my back turned on the table where my future felicity lay at stake, a felicity but so much the more intense that it was criminal. Between me and the players stood a wall of onlookers some five feet deep, who were chatting; the murmur of voices drowned the clinking of gold, which mingled in the sounds sent up by this orchestra; yet, despite all obstacles, I distinctly heard the words of the two players by a gift accorded to the passions, which enables them to annihilate time and space. I saw the points they made; I knew which of the two turned up the king as well as if I had actually seen the cards; at a distance of ten paces, in short, the fortunes of play blanched my face.

"My father suddenly went by, and then I knew what the Scripture meant by 'The Spirit of God passed before his face.' I had won. I slipped through the crowd of men who had gathered about the players with the quickness of an eel escaping through a broken mesh in a net. My nerves thrilled with joy instead of anguish. I felt like some criminal on the way to torture released by a chance meeting with the king. It happened that a man with a decoration found himself short by forty francs. Uneasy eyes suspected me; I turned pale, and drops of perspiration stood on my forehead, I was well punished, I thought, for having robbed my father. Then the kind little stout man said, in a voice like an angel's surely, 'All these gentlemen have paid their stakes,' and put down the forty francs himself. I raised my head in triumph upon the players. After I had returned the money I had taken from it to my father's purse, I left my winnings with that honest and worthy gentleman, who continued to win. As soon as I found myself possessed of a hundred and sixty francs, I wrapped them up in my handkerchief, so that

they could neither move nor rattle on the way back; and I played no more.

"'What were you doing at the card-table?' said my father as we stepped into the carriage.

"'I was looking on,' I answered, trembling.

"'But it would have been nothing out of the common if you had been prompted by self-love to put some money down on the table. In the eyes of men of the world you are quite old enough to assume the right to commit such follies. So I should have pardoned you, Raphael, if you had made use of my purse. . . . .'

"I did not answer. When we reached home, I returned the keys and money to my father. As he entered his study, he emptied out his purse on the mantelpiece, counted the money, and turned to me with a kindly look, saying, with more or less long and significant pauses between each phrase:

"'My boy, you are very nearly twenty now. I am satisfied with you. You ought to have an allowance, if only to teach you how to lay it out, and to gain some acquaintance with everyday business. Henceforward I shall let you have a hundred francs each month. Here is your first quarter's income for this year,' he added, fingering a pile of gold, as if to make sure that the amount was correct. 'Do what you please with it.'

"I confess that I was ready to fling myself at his feet, to tell him that I was a thief, a scoundrel, and, worse than all, a liar! But a feeling of shame held me back. I went up to him for an embrace, but he gently pushed me away.

"'You are a man now, *my child,*' he said. 'What I have just done was a very proper and simple thing, for which there is no need to thank me. If I have any claim to your gratitude, Raphael,' he went on, in a kind but dignified way, 'it is because I have preserved your youth from the evils that destroy young men in Paris. We will be two friends henceforth. In a year's time you will be a doctor of law. Not without some hardship and privation you have acquired the

sound knowledge and the love of, and application to, work that is indispensable to public men. You must learn to know me, Raphael. I do not want to make either an advocate or a notary of you, but a statesman, who shall be the pride of our poor house. . . . Good-night,' he added.

"From that day my father took me fully into confidence. I was an only son; and, ten years before, I had lost my mother. In time past my father, the head of a historic family remembered even now in Auvergne, had come to Paris to fight against his evil star, dissatisfied at the prospect of tilling the soil, with his useless sword by his side. He was endowed with the shrewdness that gives the men of the south of France a certain ascendency when energy goes with it. Almost unaided, he made a position for himself near the fountain of power. The Revolution brought a reverse of fortune, but he had managed to marry an heiress of good family, and, in the time of the Empire, appeared to be on the point of restoring to our house its ancient splendor.

"The Restoration, while it brought back considerable property to my mother, was my father's ruin. He had formerly purchased several estates abroad, conferred by the Emperor on his generals; and now for ten years he struggled with liquidators, diplomatists, and Prussian and Bavarian courts of law, over the disputed possession of these unfortunate endowments. My father plunged me into the intricate labyrinths of law proceedings on which our future depended. We might be compelled to return the rents, as well as the proceeds arising from sales of timber made during the years 1814 to 1817; in that case my mother's property would have barely saved our credit. So it fell out that the day on which my father in a fashion emancipated me, brought me under a most galling yoke. I entered on a conflict like a battlefield; I must work day and night; seek interviews with statesmen, surprise their convictions, try to interest them in our affairs, and gain them over, with their wives and servants, and their very dogs; and all this abominable business had to take the form of pretty speeches and polite attentions. Then

I knew the mortifications that had left their blighting traces on my father's face. For about a year I led outwardly the life of a man of the world, but enormous labors lay beneath the surface of gadding about, and eager efforts to attach myself to influential kinsmen, or to people likely to be useful to us. My relaxations were lawsuits, and memorials still furnished the staple of my conversation. Hitherto my life had been blameless, from the sheer impossibility of indulging the desires of youth; but now I became my own master, and in dread of involving us both in ruin by some piece of negligence, I did not dare to allow myself any pleasure or expenditure.

"While we are young, and before the world has rubbed off the delicate bloom from our sentiments, the freshness of our impressions, the noble purity of conscience which will never allow us to palter with evil, the sense of duty is very strong within us, the voice of honor clamors within us, and we are open and straightforward. At that time I was all these things. I wished to justify my father's confidence in me. But lately I would have stolen a paltry sum from him, with secret delight; but now that I shared the burden of his affairs, of his name and of his house, I would secretly have given up my fortune and my hopes for him, as I was sacrificing my pleasures, and even have been glad of the sacrifice! So when M. de Villèle exhumed, for our special benefit, an imperial decree concerning forfeitures, and had ruined us, I authorized the sale of my property, only retaining an island in the middle of the Loire where my mother was buried. Perhaps arguments and evasions, philosophical, philanthropic, and political considerations would not fail me now, to hinder the perpetration of what my solicitor termed a 'folly;' but at one-and-twenty, I repeat, we are all aglow with generosity and affection. The tears that stood in my father's eyes were to me the most splendid of fortunes, and the thought of those tears has often soothed my sorrow. Ten months after he had paid his creditors, my father died of grief; I was his idol, and he had ruined me! The thought killed him.

Towards the end of the autumn of 1826, at the age of twenty-two, I was the sole mourner at his graveside—the grave of my father and my earliest friend. Not many young men have found themselves alone with their thoughts as they followed a hearse, or have seen themselves lost in crowded Paris, and without money or prospects. Orphans rescued by public charity have at any rate the future of the battlefield before them, and find a shelter in some institution and a father in the government or in the *procureur du roi.* I had nothing.

"Three months later, an agent made over to me eleven hundred and twelve francs, the net proceeds of the winding up of my father's affairs. Our creditors had driven us to sell our furniture. From my childhood I had been used to set a high value on the articles of luxury about us, and I could not help showing my astonishment at the sight of this meagre balance.

" 'Oh, rococo, all of it!' said the auctioneer. A terrible word that fell like a blight on the sacred memories of my childhood, and dispelled my earliest illusions, the dearest of all. My entire fortune was comprised in this 'account rendered,' my future lay in a linen bag with eleven hundred and twelve francs in it, human society stood before me in the person of an auctioneer's clerk, who kept his hat on while he spoke. Jonathas, an old servant who was much attached to me, and whom my mother had formerly pensioned with an annuity of four hundred francs, spoke to me as I was leaving the house that I had so often gaily left for a drive in my childhood.

" 'Be very economical, Monsieur Raphael!'

"The good fellow was crying.

"Such were the events, dear Émile that ruled my destinies, moulded my character, and set me, while still young, in an utterly false social position," said Raphael after a pause. "Family ties, weak ones, it is true, bound me to a few wealthy houses, but my own pride would have kept me aloof from them if contempt and indifference had not shut their doors

on me in the first place. I was related to people who were very influential, and who lavished their patronage on strangers; but I found neither relations nor patrons in them. Continually circumscribed in my affections, they recoiled upon me. Unreserved and simple by nature, I must have appeared frigid and sophisticated. My father's discipline had destroyed all confidence in myself. I was shy and awkward; I could not believe that my opinion carried any weight whatever; I took no pleasure in myself; I thought myself ugly, and was ashamed to meet my own eyes. In spite of the inward voice that must be the stay of a man with anything in him, in all his struggles, the voice that cries, 'Courage! Go forward!' in spite of sudden revelations of my own strength in my solitude; in spite of the hopes that thrilled me as I compared new works, that the public admired so much, with the schemes that hovered in my brain,—in spite of all this, I had a childish mistrust of myself.

"An overweening ambition preyed upon me; I believed that I was meant for great things, and yet I felt myself to be nothing. I had need of other men, and I was friendless. I found I must make my way in the world, where I was quite alone, and bashful, rather than afraid.

"All through the year in which, by my father's wish, I threw myself into the whirlpool of fashionable society, I came away with an inexperienced heart, and fresh in mind. Like every grown child, I sighed in secret for a love affair. I met, among young men of my own age, a set of swaggerers who held their heads high, and talked about trifles as they seated themselves without a tremor beside women who inspired awe in me. They chattered nonsense, sucked the heads of their canes, gave themselves affected airs, appropriated the fairest women, and laid, or pretended that they had laid their heads on every pillow. Pleasure, seemingly, was at their beck and call; they looked on the most virtuous and prudish as an easy prey, ready to surrender at a word, at the slightest impudent gesture or insolent look. I declare, on my soul and conscience, that the attainment of power, or of a great

name in literature, seemed to me an easier victory than a success with some young, witty, and gracious lady of high degree.

"So I found the tumult of my heart, my feelings, and my creeds all at variance with the axioms of society. I had plenty of audacity in my character, but none in my manner. Later, I found out that women did not like to be implored. I have from afar adored many a one to whom I devoted a soul proof against all tests, a heart to break, energy that shrank from no sacrifice and from no torture; *they* accepted fools whom I would not have engaged as hall porters. How often, mute and motionless, have I not admired the lady of my dreams, swaying in the dance; given up my life in thought to one eternal caress, expressed all by hopes in a look, and laid before her, in my rapture, a young man's love, which should outstrip all fables. At some moments I was ready to barter my whole life for one single night. Well, as I could never find a listener for my impassioned proposals, eyes to rest my own upon, a heart made for my heart, I lived on in all the sufferings of impotent force that consumes itself; lacking either opportunity or courage or experience. I despaired, maybe, of making myself understood, or I feared to be understood but too well; and yet the storm within me was ready to burst at every chance courteous look. In spite of my readiness to take the semblance of interest in look or word for a tenderer solicitude, I dared neither to speak nor to be silent seasonably. My words grew insignificant, and my silence stupid, by sheer stress of emotion. I was too ingenuous, no doubt, for that artificial life, led by candle-light, where every thought is expressed in conventional phrases, or by words that fashion dictates; and not only so, I had not learned how to employ speech that says nothing, and silence that says a great deal. In short, I concealed the fires that consumed me, and with such a soul as women wish to find, with all the elevation of soul that they long for, and a mettle that fools plume themselves upon, all women have been cruelly treacherous to me.

"So in my simplicity I admired the heroes of this set when

they bragged about their conquests, and never suspected them of lying. No doubt it was a mistake to wish for a love that springs for a word's sake; to expect to find in the heart of a vain, frivolous woman, greedy for luxury and intoxicated with vanity, the great sea of passion that surged tempestuously in my own breast. Oh! to feel that you were born to love, to make some woman's happiness, and yet to find not one, not even a noble and courageous Marceline, not so much as an old Marquise! Oh! to carry a treasure in your wallet, and not find even some child, or inquisitive young girl, to admire it! In my despair I often wished to kill myself."

"Finely tragical to-night!" cried Émile.

"Let me pass sentence on my life," Raphael answered. "If your friendship is not strong enough to bear with my elegy, if you cannot put up with half an hour's tedium for my sake, go to sleep! But, then, never ask again for the reason of the suicide that hangs over me, that comes nearer and calls to me, that I bow myself before. If you are to judge a man, you must know his secret thoughts, sorrows, and feelings; to know merely the outward events of a man's life would only serve to make a chronological table—a fool's notion of history."

Émile was so much struck with the bitter tones in which there words were spoken, that he began to pay close attention to Raphael, whom he watched with a bewildered expression.

"Now," continued the speaker, "all these things that befell me appear in a new light. The sequence of events that I once thought so unfortunate created the splendid powers of which, later, I became so proud. If I may believe you, I possess the power of readily expressing my thoughts, and I could take a forward place in the great field of knowledge; and is not this the result of scientific curiosity, of excessive application, and a love of reading which possessed me from the age of seven till my entry on life? The very neglect in which I was left, and the consequent habits of self-repression and self-concentration; did not these things teach me how to consider and reflect? Nothing in me was squandered in

obedience to the exactions of the world, which humble the proudest soul and reduce it to a mere husk; and was it not this very fact that refined the emotional part of my nature till it became the perfected instrument of a loftier purpose than passionate desires? I remember watching the women who mistook me with all the insight of contemned love.

"I can see now that my natural sincerity must have been displeasing to them; women, perhaps, even require a little hyprocrisy. And I, who in the same hour's space am alternately a man and a child, frivolous and thoughtful, free from bias and brimful of superstition, and oftentimes myself as much a woman as any of them; how should they do otherwise than take my simplicity for cynicism, my innocent candor for impudence? They found my knowledge tiresome; my feminine languor, weakness. I was held to be listless and incapable of love or of steady purpose; a too active imagination, that curse of poets, was no doubt the cause. My silence was idiotic; and as I daresay I alarmed them by my efforts to please, women one and all have condemned me. With tears and mortification, I bowed before the decision of the world; but my distress was not barren. I determined to revenge myself on society; I would dominate the feminine intellect, and so have the feminine soul at my mercy; all eyes should be fixed upon me, when the servant at the door announced my name. I had determined from my childhood that I would be a great man; I said with André Chenier, as I struck my forehead, 'There is something underneath that!' I felt, I believed, the thought within me that I must express, the system I must establish, the knowledge I must interpret.

"Let me pour out my follies, dear Émile; to-day I am barely twenty-six years old, certain of dying unrecognized, and I have never been the lover of the woman I dreamed of possessing. Have we not all of us, more or less, believed in the reality of a thing because we wished it? I would never have a young man for my friend who did not place himself in dreams upon a pedestal, weave crowns for his head, and have

complaisant mistresses. I myself would often be a general, nay, emperor; I have been a Byron, and then a nobody. After this sport on these pinnacles of human achievement, I became aware that all the difficulties and steeps of life were yet to face. My exuberant self-esteem came to my aid; I had that intense belief in my destiny, which perhaps amounts to genius in those who will not permit themselves to be distracted by contact with the world, as sheep that leave their wool on the briars of every thicket they pass by. I meant to cover myself with glory, and to work in silence for the mistress I hoped to have one day. Women for me were resumed into a single type, and this woman I looked to meet in the first that met my eyes; but in each and all I saw a queen, and as queens must make the first advances to their lovers, they must draw near to me—to me, so sickly, shy, and poor. For her, who should take pity on me, my heart held in store such gratitude over and beyond love, that I had worshiped her her whole life long. Later, my observations have taught be bitter truths.

"In this way, dear Émile, I ran the risk of remaining companionless for good. The incomprehensible bent of women's minds appears to lead them to see nothing but the weak points in a clever man, and the strong points of a fool. They feel the liveliest sympathy with the fool's good qualities, which perpetually flatter their own defects; while they find the man of talent hardly agreeable enough to compensate for his shortcomings. All capacity is a sort of intermittent fever, and no woman is anxious to share in its discomforts only; they look to find in their lovers the wherewithal to gratify their own vanity. It is themselves that they love in us! But the artist, poor and proud, along with his endowment of creative power, is furnished with an aggressive egotism! Everything about him is involved in I know not what whirlpool of his ideas, and even his mistress must gyrate along with them. How is a woman, spoilt with praise, to believe in the love of a man like that? Will she go to seek him out? That sort of lover has not the leisure to sit beside

a sofa and give himself up to the sentimental simperings that women are so fond of, and on which the false and unfeeling pride themselves. He cannot spare the time from his work, and how can he afford to humble himself and go a-masquerading! I was ready to give my life once and for all, but I could not degrade it in detail. Besides, there is something indescribably paltry in a stockbroker's tactics, who runs on errands for some insipid affected woman; all this disgusts an artist. Love in the abstract is not enough for a great man in poverty; he has need of its utmost devotion. The frivolous creatures who spend their lives in trying on cashmeres, or make themselves into clothes-pegs to hang the fashions from, exact the devotion which is not theirs to give; for them, love means the pleasure of ruling and not of obeying. She who is really a wife, one in heart, flesh, and bone, must follow wherever he leads, in whom her life, her strength, her pride, and happiness are centered. Ambitious men need those Oriental women whose whole thought is given to the study of their requirements; for unhappiness means for them the incompatibility of their means with their desires. But I, who took myself for a man of genius, must needs feel attracted by these very she-coxcombs. So, as I cherished ideas so different from those generally received; as I wished to scale the heavens without a ladder, was possessed of wealth that could not circulate, and of knowledge so wide and so imperfectly arranged and digested that it overtaxed my memory; as I had neither relations nor friends in the midst of this lonely and ghastly desert, a desert of paving stones, full of animation, life, and thought, wherein every one is worse than inimical, indifferent to wit; I made a very natural, if foolish resolve, which required such unknown impossibilities, that my spirits rose. It was as if I had laid a wager with myself, for I was at once the player and the cards.

"This was my plan. The eleven hundred francs must keep life in me for three years—the time I allowed myself in which to bring to light a work which should draw attention to me,

and make me either a name or a fortune. I exulted at the thought of living on bread and milk, like a hermit in the Thebaid, while I plunged into the world of books and ideas, and so reached a lofty sphere beyond the tumult of Paris, a sphere of silent labor where I would entomb myself like a chrysalis to await a brilliant and splendid new birth. I imperiled my life in order to live. By reducing my requirements to real needs and the barest necessaries, I found that three hundred and sixty-five francs sufficed for a year of penury; and, in fact, I managed to exist on that slender sum, so long as I submitted to my own claustral discipline."

"Impossible!" cried Émile.

"I lived for nearly three years in that way," Raphael answered, with a kind of pride. "Let us reckon it out. Three *sous* for bread, two for milk, and three for cold meat, kept me from dying of hunger, and my mind in a state of peculiar lucidity. I have observed, as you know, the wonderful effects produced by diet upon the imagination. My lodgings cost me three *sous* daily; I burnt three *sous* more in oil at night; I did my own housework, and wore flannel shirts so as to reduce the laundress' bill to two *sous* per day. The money I spent yearly in coal, if divided up, never cost more than two *sous* for each day. I had three years' supply of clothing, and I only dressed when going out to some library or public lecture. These expenses, all told, only amounted to eighteen *sous,* so two were left over for emergencies. I cannot recollect, during that long period of toil, either crossing the Pont des Arts, or paying for water; I went out to fetch it every morning from the fountain in the Place Saint Michel, at the corner of the Rue de Grès. Oh, I wore my poverty proudly. A man urged on towards a fair future walks through life like an innocent person to his death; he feels no shame about it.

"I would not think of illness. Like Aquilina, I faced the hospital without terror. I had not a moment's doubt of my health, and besides, the poor can only take to their beds to die. I cut my own hair till the day when an angel of love and

kindness . . . But I do not want to anticipate the state of things that I shall reach later. You must simply know that I lived with one grand thought for a mistress, a dream, an illusion which deceives us all more or less at first. To-day I laugh at myself, at that self, holy perhaps and heroic, which is now no more. I have since had a closer view of society and the world, of our manners and customs, and seen the dangers of my innocent credulity and the superfluous nature of my fervent toil. Stores of that sort are quite useless to aspirants for fame. Light should be the baggage of seekers after fortune!

"Ambitious men spend their youth in rendering themselves worthy of patronage; it is their great mistake. While the foolish creatures are laying in stores of knowledge and energy, so that they shall not sink under the weight of responsible posts that recede from them, schemers come and go who are wealthy in words and destitute in ideas, astonish the ignorant, and creep into the confidence of those who have a little knowledge. While the first kind study, the second march ahead; the one sort is modest, and the other impudent; the man of genius is silent about his own merits, but these schemers make a flourish of theirs, and they are bound to get on. It is so strongly to the interest of men in office to believe in ready-made capacity, and in brazen-faced merit, that it is downright childish of the learned to expect material rewards. I do not seek to paraphrase the commonplace moral, the song of songs that obscure genius is for ever singing; I want to come, in a logical manner, by the reason of the frequent successes of mediocrity. Alas! study shows us such a mother's kindness that it would be a sin perhaps to ask any other reward of her than the pure and delightful pleasures with which she sustains her children.

"Often I remember soaking my break in milk, as I sat by the window to take the fresh air; while my eyes wandered over a view of roofs—brown, gray, or red, slated or tiled, and covered with yellow or green mosses. At first the prospect may have seemed monotonous, but I very soon found peculiar

beauties in it. Sometimes at night, streams of light through half-closed shutters would light up and color the dark abysses of this strange landscape. Sometimes the feeble lights of the street lamps sent up yellow gleams through the fog, and in each street dimly outlined the undulations of a crowd of roofs, like billows in a motionless sea. Very occasionally, too, a face appeared in this gloomy waste; above the flowers in some skyey garden I caught a glimpse of an old woman's crooked angular profile as she watered her nasturtiums; or, in a crazy attic window, a young girl, fancying herself quite alone as she dressed herself—a view of nothing more than a fair forehead and long tresses held above her by a pretty white arm.

"I liked to see the short-lived plant-life in the gutters—poor weeds that a storm soon washed away. I studied the mosses, with their colors revived by showers, or transformed by the sun into a brown velvet that fitfully caught the light. Such things as these formed my recreations—the passing poetic moods of daylight, the melancholy mists, sudden gleams of sunlight, the silence and the magic of night, the mysteries of dawn, the smoke wreaths from each chimney; every chance event, in fact, in my curious world became familiar to me. I came to love this prison of my own choosing. This level Parisian prairie of roofs, beneath which lay populous abysses, suited my humor, and harmonized with my thoughts.

"Sudden descents into the world from the divine height of scientific meditation are very exhausting; and, besides, I had apprehended perfectly the bare life of the cloister. When I made up my mind to carry out this new plan of life, I looked for quarters in the most out-of-the-way parts of Paris. One evening, as I returned home to the Rue des Cordiers from the Place de l'Estrapade, I saw a girl of fourteen playing with a battledore at the corner of the Rue de Cluny; her winsome ways and laughter amused the neighbors. September was not yet over; it was warm and fine, so that women sat chatting before their doors as if it were a fête-day

in some country town. At first I watched the charming expression of the girl's face and her graceful attitudes, her pose fit for a painter. It was a pretty sight. I looked about me, seeking to understand this blithe simplicity in the midst of Paris, and saw that the street was a blind alley and but little frequented. I remembered that Jean Jacques had once lived here, and looked up the Hôtel Saint-Quentin. Its dilapidated condition awakened hopes of a cheap lodging, and I determined to enter.

"I found myself in a room with a low ceiling; the candles, in classic-looking copper candle-sticks, were set in a row under each key. The predominating cleanliness of the room made a striking contrast to the usual state of such places. This one was as neat as a bit of *genre;* there was a charming trimness about the blue coverlet, the cooking pots and furniture. The mistress of the house rose and came to me. She seemed to be about forty years of age; sorrows had left their traces on her features, and weeping had dimmed her eyes. I deferentially mentioned the amount I could pay; it seemed to cause her no surprise; she sought out a key from the row, went up to the attics with me, and showed me a room that looked out on the neighboring roofs and courts; long poles with linen drying on them hung out of the window.

"Nothing could be uglier than this garret, awaiting its scholar, with its dingy yellow walls and odor of poverty. The roofing fell in a steep slope, and the sky was visible through chinks in the tiles. There was room for a bed, a table, and a few chairs, and beneath the highest point of the roof my piano could stand. Not being rich enough to furnish this cage (that might have been one of the *Piombi* of Venice), the poor woman had never been able to let it; and as I had saved from the recent sale, the furniture that was in a fashion peculiarly mine, I very soon came to terms with my landlady, and moved in on the following day.

"For three years I lived in this airy sepulchre, and worked unflaggingly day and night; and so great was the pleasure that study seemed to me the fairest theme and the happiest

solution of life. The tranquillity and peace that a scholar needs is something as sweet and exhilarating as love. Unspeakable joys are showered on us by the exertion of our mental faculties; the quest of ideas, and the tranquil contemplation of knowledge; delights indescribable, because purely intellectual and impalpable to our senses. So we are obliged to use material terms to express the mysteries of the soul. The pleasure of striking out in some lonely lake of clear water, with forests, rocks, and flowers around, and the soft stirring of the warm breeze,—all this would give to those who knew them not, a very faint idea of the exultation with which my soul bathed itself in the beams of an unknown light, hearkened to the awful and uncertain voice of inspiration, as vision upon vision poured from some unknown source through my throbbing brain.

"No earthly pleasure can compare with the divine delight of watching the dawn of an idea in the space of abstractions as it rises like the morning sun; an idea that, better still, attains gradually like a child to puberty and man's estate. Study lends a kind of enchantment to all our surroundings. The wretched desk covered with brown leather at which I wrote, my piano, bed, and armchair, the odd wall-paper and furniture seemed to have for me a kind of life in them, and to be humble friends of mine and mute partakers of my destiny. How often have I confided my soul to them in a glance! A warped bit of beading often met my eyes, and suggested new developments,—a striking proof of my system, or a felicitious word by which to render my all but inexpressible thought. By sheer contemplation of the things about me I discerned an expression and a character in each. If the setting sun happened to steal in through my narrow window, they would take new colors, fade or shine, grow dull or gay, and always amaze me with some new effect. These trifling incidents of a solitary life, which escape those preoccupied with outward affairs, make the solace of prisoners. And what was I but the captive of an idea, imprisoned in my system, but sustained also by the prospect of a brilliant future? At each

obstacle that I overcame, I seemed to kiss the soft hands of a woman with a fair face, a wealthy, well-dressed woman, who should some day say softly, while she caressed my hair:

"'Poor angel, how thou hast suffered!'

"I had undertaken two great works—one a comedy that in a very short time must bring me wealth and fame, and an entry into those circles whither I wished to return, to exercise the royal privileges of a man of genius. You all saw nothing in that masterpiece but the blunder of a young man fresh from college, a babyish fiasco. Your jokes clipped the wings of a throng of illusions, which have never stirred since within me. You, dear Émile, alone brought soothing to the deep wounds that others had made in my heart. You alone will admire my 'Theory of the Will.' I devoted most of my time to that long work, for which I studied Oriental languages, physiology and anatomy. If I do not deceive myself, my labors will complete the task begun by Mesmer, Lavater, Gale, and Bichat, and open up new paths in science.

"There ends that fair life of mine, the daily sacrifice, the unrecognized silkworm's toil, that is, perhaps, its own sole recompense. Since attaining years of discretion, until the day when I finished my 'Theory,' I observed, learned, wrote, and read unintermittingly; my life was one long imposition, as schoolboys say. Though by nature effeminately attached to Oriental indolence, sensual in tastes, and a wooer of dreams, I worked incessantly, and refused to taste any of the enjoyments of Parisian life. Though a glutton, I became abstemious; and loving exercise and sea voyages as I did, and haunted by the wish to visit many countries, still child enough to play at ducks and drakes with pebbles over a pond, I led a sedentary life with a pen in my fingers. I liked talking, but I went to sit and mutely listen to professors who gave public lectures at the *Bibliothèque* or the Museum. I slept upon my solitary pallet like a Benedictine brother, though woman was my one chimera, a chimera that fled from me as I wooed it! In short, my life has been a cruel contradiction, a perpetual cheat. After that, judge a man!

"Sometimes my natural propensities broke out like a fire long smothered. I was debarred from the women whose society I desired, stripped of everything and lodged in an artist's garret, and by a sort of mirage or calenture I was surrounded by captivating mistresses. I drove through the streets of Paris, lolling on the soft cushions of a fine equipage. I plunged into dissipation, into corroding vice, I desired and possessed everything, for fasting had made me light-headed like the tempted Saint Anthony. Slumber, happily, would put an end at last to these devastating trances; and on the morrow science would beckon me, smiling, and I was faithful to her. I imagine that women reputed virtuous, must often fall a prey to these insane tempests of desire and passion, which rise in us in spite of ourselves. Such dreams have a charm of their own; they are something akin to evening gossip round the winter fire, when one sets out for some voyage in China. But what becomes of virtue during these delicious excursions, when fancy overleaps all difficulties?

"During the first ten months of seclusion I led the life of poverty and solitude that I have described to you; I used to steal out unobserved every morning to buy my own provisions for the day; I tidied my room; I was at once master and servant, and played the Diogenes with incredible spirit. But afterwards, while my hostess and her daughter watched my ways and behavior, scrutinized my appearance and divined my poverty, there could not but be some bonds between us; perhaps because they were themselves so very poor. Pauline, the charming child, whose latent and unconscious grace had, in a manner, brought me there, did me many services that I could not well refuse. All women fallen on evil days are sisters; they speak a common language; they have the same generosity—the generosity that possesses nothing, and so is lavish of its affection, of its time, and of its very self.

"Imperceptibly Pauline took me under her protection, and would do things for me. No kind of objection was made by her mother, whom I even surprised mending my linen; she blushed for the charitable occupation. In spite of myself, they took charge of me, and I accepted their services.

"In order to understand the peculiar condition of my mind, my preoccupation with work must be remembered, the tyranny of ideas, and the instinctive repugnance that a man who leads an intellectual life must ever feel for the material details of existence. Could I well repulse the delicate attentions of Pauline, who would noiselessly bring me my frugal repast, when she noticed that I had taken nothing for seven or eight hours? She had the tact of a woman and the inventiveness of a child; she would smile as she made sign to me that I must not see her. Ariel glided under my roof in the form of a sylph who foresaw every want of mine.

"One evening Pauline told me her story with touching simplicity. Her father had been a major in the horse grenadiers of the Imperial guard. He had been taken prisoner by the Cossacks, at the passage of the Beresina; and when Napoleon later on proposed an exchange, the Russian authorities made search for him in Siberia in vain; he had escaped with a view of reaching India, and since then Mme. Gaudin, my landlady, could hear no news of her husband. Then came the disasters of 1814 and 1815; and, left alone and without resource, she had decided to let furnished lodgings in order to keep herself and her daughter.

"She always hoped to see her husband again. Her greatest trouble was about her daughter's education; the princess Borghese was her Pauline's godmother; and Pauline must not be unworthy of the fair future promised by her imperial protectress. When Mme. Gaudin confided to me this heavy trouble that preyed upon her, she said, with sharp pain in her voice, 'I would give up the property and the scrap of paper that makes Gaudin a baron of the empire, and all our rights to the endowment of Wistchnau, if only Pauline could be brought up at Saint-Denis!' Her words struck me; now I could show my gratitude for the kindnesses expended on me by the two women; all at once the idea of offering to finish Pauline's education occurred to me; and the offer was made and accepted in the most perfect simplicity. In this way I came to have some hours of recreation. Pauline had natural

aptitude; she learned so quickly, that she soon surpassed me at the piano. As she became accustomed to think aloud in my presence, she unfolded all the sweet refinements of a heart that was opening itself out to life, as some flower-cup opens slowly to the sun. She listened to me, pleased and thoughtful, letting her dark velvet eyes rest upon me with a half smile in them; she repeated her lessons in soft and gentle tones, and showed childish glee when I was satisfied with her. Her mother grew more and more anxious every day to shield the young girl from every danger (for all the beauty promised in early life was developing in the crescent moon), and was glad to see her spend whole days indoors in study. My piano was the only one she could use, and while I was out she practised on it. When I came home, Pauline would be in my room, in her shabby dress, but her slightest movement revealed her slender figure in its attractive grace, in spite of the coarse materials that she wore. As with the heroine of the fable of *'Peau-d'Ane,'* a dainty foot peeped out of the clumsy shoes. But all her wealth of girlish beauty was as lost upon me. I had laid commands upon myself to see a sister only in Pauline. I dreaded lest I should betray her mother's faith in me. I admired the lovely girl as if she had been a picture, or as the portrait of a dead mistress; she was at once my child and my statue. For me, another Pygmalion, the maiden with the hues of life and the living voice was to become a form of inanimate marble. I was very strict with her, but the more I made her feel my pedagogue's severity, the more gentle and submissive she grew.

"If a generous feeling strengthened me in my reserve and self-restraint, prudent considerations were not lacking beside. Integrity of purpose cannot, I think, fail to accompany integrity in money matters. To my mind, to become insolvent or to betray a woman is the same sort of thing. If you love a young girl, or allow yourself to be beloved by her, a contract is implied, and its conditions should be thoroughly understood. We are free to break with the woman who sells herself, but not with the young girl who has given herself to

us and does not know the extent of her sacrifice. I must have married Pauline, and that would have been madness. Would it not have given over that sweet girlish heart to terrible misfortunes? My poverty made its selfish voice heard, and set an iron barrier between that gentle nature and mine. Besides, I am ashamed to say, that I cannot imagine love in the midst of poverty. Perhaps this is a vitiation due to that malady of mankind called civilization; but a woman in squalid poverty would exert no fascination over me, were she attractive as Homer's Galatea, the fair Helen.

"Ah, *vive l'amour!* But let it be in silk and cashmere, surrounded with the luxury which so marvelously embellishes it; for is it not perhaps itself a luxury? I enjoy making havoc with an elaborate erection of scented hair; I like to crush flowers, to disarrange and crease a smart toilette at will. A bizarre attraction lies for me in burning eyes that blaze through a lace veil, like flame through cannon smoke. My way of love would be to mount by a silken ladder, in the silence of a winter night. And what bliss to reach, all powdered with snow, a perfumed room, with hangings of painted silk, to find a woman there, who likewise shakes away the snow from her; for what other name can be found for the white muslin wrappings that vaguely define her, like some angel form issuing from a cloud! And then I wish for furtive joys, for the security of audacity. I want to see once more that woman of mystery, but let it be in the throng, dazzling, unapproachable, adored on all sides, dressed in laces and ablaze with diamonds, laying her commands upon every one; so exalted above us, that she inspires awe, and none dares to pay his homage to her.

"She gives me a stolen glance, amid her court, a look that exposes the unreality of all this; that resigns for me the world and all men in it! Truly I have scorned myself for a passion for a few yards of lace, velvet, and fine lawn, and the hairdresser's feats of skill; a love of wax-lights, a carriage and a title, a heraldic coronet painted on window panes, or engraved by a jeweler; in short, a liking for all that is adven-

titious and least woman in woman. I have scorned and reasoned with myself, but all in vain.

"A woman of rank with her subtle smile, her high-born air, and self-esteem captivates me. The barriers she erects between herself and the world waken my vanity, a good half of love. There would be more relish for me in bliss that all others envied. If my mistress does nothing that other women do, and neither lives nor conducts herself like them, wears a cloak that they cannot attain, breathes a perfume of her own, then she seems to rise far above me. The further she rises from earth, even in the earthlier aspects of love, the fairer she becomes for me.

"Luckily for me we have had no queen in France these twenty years, for I should have fallen in love with her. A woman must be wealthy to acquire the manners of a princess. What place had Pauline among these far-fetched imaginings? Could she bring me the love that is death, that brings every faculty into play, the nights that are paid for by life? We hardly die, I think, for an insignificant girl who gives herself to us; and I could never extinguish these feelings and poet's dreams within me. I was born for an inaccessible love, and fortune has overtopped my desire.

"How often have I set satin shoes on Pauline's tiny feet, confined her form, slender as a young poplar, in a robe of gauze, and thrown a loose scarf about her as I saw her tread the carpets in her mansion and led her out to her splendid carriage! In such guise I should have adored her. I endowed her with all the pride she lacked, stripped her of her virtues, her natural simple charm, and frank smile, in order to plunge her heart in our Styx of depravity that makes invulnerable, load her with our crimes, make of her the fantastical doll of our drawing-rooms, the frail being who lies abed in the morning and comes to life again at night with the dawn of tapers. Pauline was fresh-hearted and affectionate—I would have had her cold and formal.

"In the last days of my frantic folly, memory brought Pauline before me, as it brings the scenes of our childhood,

and made me pause to muse over past delicious moments that softened my heart. I sometimes saw her, the adorable girl who sat quietly sewing at my table, wrapped in her meditations; the faint light from my window fell upon her and was reflected back in silvery rays from her thick black hair; sometimes I heard her young laughter, or the rich tones of her voice singing some canzonet that she composed without effort. And often my Pauline seemed to grow greater, as music flowed from her, and her face bore a striking resemblance to the noble one that Carlo Dolci chose for the type of Italy. My cruel memory brought her back athwart the dissipations of my existence, like a remorse, or a symbol of purity. But let us leave the poor child to her own fate. Whatever her troubles may have been, at any rate I protected her from a menacing tempest—I did not drag her down into my hell.

"Until last winter I led the uneventful studious life of which I have given you some faint picture. In the earliest days of December 1829, I came across Rastignac, who, in spite of the shabby condition of my wardrobe, linked his arm in mine, and inquired into my affairs with a quite brotherly interest. Caught by his engaging manner, I gave him a brief account of my life and hopes; he began to laugh, and treated me as a mixture, of a man of genius and a fool. His Gascon accent and knowledge of the world, the easy life his clever management procured for him, all produced an irresistible effect upon me. I should die an unrecognized failure in a hospital, Rastignac said, and be buried in a pauper's grave. He talked of charlatanism. Every man of genius was a charlatan, he plainly showed me in that pleasant way of his that makes him so fascinating. He insisted that I must be out of my senses, and would be my own death, if I lived on alone in the Rue des Cordiers. According to him, I ought to go into society, to accustom people to the sound of my name, and to rid myself of the simple title of 'monsieur' which sits but ill on a great man in his lifetime.

" 'Those who know no better,' he cried, 'call this sort of business *scheming,* and moral people condemn it for a "dis-

sipated life." We need not stop to look at what people think, but see the results. You work, you say? Very good, but nothing will ever come of that. Now, I am ready for anything and fit for nothing. As lazy as a lobster? Very likely, but I succeed everywhere. I go out into society, I push myself forward, the others make way before me; I brag and am believed; I incur debts which somebody else pays! Dissipation, dear boy, is a methodical policy. The life of a man who deliberately runs through his fortune often becomes a business speculation; his friends, his pleasures, patrons, and acquaintances are his capital. Suppose a merchant runs a risk of a million, for twenty years he can neither sleep, eat, nor amuse himself; he is brooding over his million; it makes him run about all over Europe; he worries himself, goes to the devil in every way that man has invented. Then comes a liquidation, such as I have seen myself, which very often leaves him penniless and without a reputation or a friend. The spendthrift, on the other hand, takes life as a serious game, and sees his horses run. He loses his capital, perhaps, but he stands a chance of being nominated Receiver-General, of making a wealthy marriage, or of an appointment of attaché to a minister or ambassador; and he has his friends left and his name, and he never wants money. He knows the standing of everybody, and uses every one for his own benefit. Is this logical, or am I a madman after all? Haven't you there all the moral of the comedy that goes on every day in this world? . . . Your work is completed,' he went on after a pause; 'you are immensely clever! Well, you have only arrived at my starting-point. Now, you had better look after its success yourself; it is the surest way. You will make allies in every clique, and secure applause beforehand. I mean to go halves in your glory myself; I shall be the jeweler who set the diamonds in your crown. Come here to-morrow evening, by way of a beginning. I will introduce you to a house where all Paris goes, all *our* Paris, that is—the Paris of exquisites, millionaires, celebrities, all the folk who talk gold like Chrysostom. When they have taken up a book, that book

becomes the fashion; and if it is something really good for once, they will have declared it to be a work of genius without knowing it. If you have any sense, my dear fellow, you will ensure the success of your "Theory," by a better understanding of the theory of success. To-morrow evening you shall go to see that queen of the moment—the beautiful Countess Fœdora. . . .'

"'I have never heard of her. . . .'

"'You Hottentot!' laughed Rastignac; 'you do not know Fœdora? A great match with an income of nearly eighty thousand livres, who has taken a fancy to nobody, or else no one has taken a fancy to her. A sort of feminine enigma, a half Russian Parisienne, or a half Parisian Russian. All the romantic productions that never get published are brought out at her house; she is the handsomest woman in Paris, and the most gracious! You are not even a Hottentot; you are something between the Hottentot and the beast. . . . Good-bye till to-morrow.'

"He swung round on his heel and made off without waiting for my answer. It never occurred to him that a reasoning being could refuse an introduction to Fœdora. How can the fascination of a name be explained? FŒDORA haunted me like some evil thought, with which you seek to come to terms. A voice said in me, 'You are going to see Fœdora!' In vain I reasoned with that voice, saying that it lied to me; all my arguments were defeated by the name 'Fœdora.' Was not the name, and even the woman herself, the symbol of all my desires, and the object of my life?

"The name called up recollections of the conventional glitter of the world, the upper world of Paris with its brilliant fêtes and the tinsel of its vanities. The woman brought before me all the problems of passion on which my mind continually ran. Perhaps it was neither the woman nor the name, but my own propensities, that sprang up within me and tempted me afresh. Here was the Countess Fœdora, rich and loveless, proof against the temptations of Paris; was not this woman the very incarnation of my hopes and visions?

I fashioned her for myself, drew her in fancy, and dreamed of her. I could not sleep that night: I became her lover; I overbrimmed a few hours with a whole lifetime—a lover's lifetime; the experience of its prolific delights burned me.

"The next day I could not bear the tortures of delay; I borrowed a novel, and spent the whole day over it, so that I could not possibly think nor keep account of the time till night. Fœdora's name echoed through me even as I read, but only as a distant sound: though it could be heard, it was not troublesome. Fortunately, I owned a fairly creditable black coat and a white waistcoat: of all my fortune there now remained about thirty francs, which I had distributed about among my clothes and in my drawers, so as to erect between my whims and the spending of a five-franc piece a thorny barrier of search, and an adventurous peregrination round my room. While I was dressing, I dived about for my money in an ocean of papers. This scarcity of specie will give you some idea of the value of that squandered upon gloves and cab-hire; a month's bread disappeared at one fell swoop. Alas! money is always forthcoming for our caprices; we only grudge the cost of things that are useful or necessary. We recklessly fling gold to an opera-dancer, and haggle with a tradesman whose hungry family must wait for the settlement of our bill. How many men are there that wear a coat that cost a hundred francs, and carry a diamond in the head of their cane, and dine for twenty-five *sous* for all that! It seems as though we could never pay enough for the pleasures of vanity.

"Rastignac, punctual to his appointment, smiled at the transformation, and joked about it. On the way he gave me benevolent advice as to my conduct with the countess; he described her as mean, vain, and suspicious; but though mean, she was ostentatious, her vanity was transparent, and her mistrust good-humored.

"'You know I am pledged,' he said, 'and what I should lose, too, if I tried a change in love. So my observation of Fœdora has been quite cool and disinterested, and my remarks

must have some truth in them. I was looking to your future when I thought of introducing you to her; so mind very carefully what I am about to say. She has a terrible memory. She is clever enough to drive a diplomatist wild; she would know it at once if he spoke the truth. Between ourselves, I fancy that her marriage was not recognized by the Emperor, for the Russian ambassador began to smile when I spoke of her; he does not receive her either, and only bows very coolly if he meets her in the Bois. For all that, she is in Madame de Sérizy's set, and visits Mesdames de Nucingen and de Restaud. There is no cloud over her here in France; the Duchesse de Carigliano, the most strait-laced maréchale in the whole Bonapartist coterie, often goes to spend the summer with her at her country house. Plenty of young fops, sons of peers of France, have offered her a title in exchange for her fortune, and she has politely declined them all. Her susceptibilities, maybe, are not to be touched by anything less than a count. Aren't you a marquis? Go ahead if you fancy her. This is what you may call receiving your instructions.'

"His raillery made me think that Rastignac wished to joke and excite my curiosity, so that I was in a paroxysm of my extemporized passion by the time that we stopped before a peristyle full of flowers. My heart beat and my color rose as we went up the great carpeted staircase, and I noticed about me all the studied refinements of English comfort; I was infatuatedly *bourgeois;* I forgot my origin and all my personal and family pride. Alas! I had but just left a garret, after three years of poverty, and I could not just then set the treasures there acquired above such trifles as these. Nor could I rightly estimate the worth of the vast intellectual capital which turns to riches at the moment when opportunity comes within our reach, opportunity that does not overwhelm, because study has prepared us for the struggles of public life.

"I found a woman of about twenty-two years of age; she was of average height, was dressed in white, and held a feather

fire-screen in her hand; a group of men stood around her. She rose at the sight of Rastignac, and came towards us with a gracious smile and a musically-uttered compliment, prepared no doubt beforehand, for me. Our friend had spoken of me as a rising man, and his clever way of making the most of me had procured me this flattering reception. I was confused by the attention that every one paid to me; but Rastignac had luckily mentioned my modesty. I was brought in contact with scholars, men of letters, ex-ministers, and peers of France. The conversation, interrupted a while by my coming, was resumed. I took courage, feeling that I had a reputation to maintain, and without abusing my privilege, I spoke when it fell to me to speak, trying to state the questions at issue in words more or less profound, witty or trenchant, and I made a certain sensation. Rastignac was a prophet for the thousandth time in his life. As soon as the gathering was large enough to restore freedom to individuals, he took my arm, and we went round the rooms.

"'Don't look as if you were too much struck by the princess,' he said, 'or she will guess your object in coming to visit her.'

"The rooms were furnished in excellent taste. Each apartment had a character of its own, as in wealthy English houses; and the silken hangings, the style of the furniture, and the ornaments, even the most trifling, were all subordinated to the original idea. In a gothic boudoir the doors were concealed by tapestried curtains, and the paneling by hangings; the clock and the pattern of the carpet were made to harmonize with the gothic surroundings. The ceiling, with its carved cross-beams of brown wood, was full of charm and originality; the panels were beautifully wrought; nothing disturbed the general harmony of the scheme of decoration, not even the windows with their rich colored glass. I was surprised by the extensive knowledge of decoration that some artist had brought to bear on a little modern room, it was so pleasant and fresh, and not heavy, but subdued with its dead gold hues. It had all the vague sentiment of a German bal-

lad; it was a retreat fit for some romance of 1827, perfumed by the exotic flowers set in their stands. Another apartment in the suite was a gilded reproduction of the Louis Quatorze period, with modern paintings on the walls in odd but pleasant contrast.

"'You would not be so badly lodged,' was Rastignac's slightly sarcastic comment. 'It is captivating, isn't it?' he added, smiling as he sat down. Then suddenly he rose, and led me by the hand into a bedroom, where the softened light fell upon the bed under its canopy of muslin and white watered silk—a couch for a young fairy betrothed to one of the genii.

"'Isn't it wantonly bad taste, insolent and unbounded coquetry,' he said, lowering his voice, 'that allows us to see this throne of love? She gives herself to no one, and anybody may leave his card here. If I were not committed, I should like to see her at my feet all tears and submission.'

"'Are you so certain of her virtue?'

"'The boldest and even the cleverest adventurers among us, acknowledge themselves defeated, and continue to be her lovers and devoted friends. Isn't that woman a puzzle?"

"His words seemed to intoxicate me; I had jealous fears already of the past. I leapt for joy, and hurried back to the countess, whom I had seen in the gothic boudoir. She stopped me by a smile, made me sit beside her, and talked about my work, seeming to take the greatest interest in it, and all the more when I set forth my theories amusingly, instead of adopting the formal language of a professor for their explanation. It seemed to divert her to be told that the human will was a material force like steam; that in the moral world nothing could resist its power if a man taught himself to concentrate it, to economize it, and to project continually its fluid mass in given directions upon other souls. Such a man, I said, could modify all things relatively to man, even the peremptory laws of nature. The questions Fœdora raised showed a certain keenness of intellect. I took a pleasure in deciding some of them in her favor, in order to flatter her;

then I confuted her feminine reasoning with a word, and roused her curiosity by drawing her attention to an every-day matter—to sleep, a thing so apparently commonplace, that in reality is an insoluble problem for science. The countess sat in silence for a moment when I told her that our ideas were complete organic beings, existing in an invisible world, and influencing our destinies; and for witnesses I cited the opinions of Descartes, Diderot, and Napoleon, who had directed, and still directed, all the currents of the age.

"So I had the honor of amusing this woman; she asked me to come to see her when she left me; giving me *les grande entrées,* in the language of the court. Whether it was by dint of substituting polite formulas for genuine expressions of feeling, a commendable habit of mine, or because Fœdora hailed in me a coming celebrity, an addition to her learned menagerie; for some reason I thought I had pleased her. I called all my previous physiological studies and knowledge of woman to my aid, and minutely scrutinized this singular person and her ways all the evening. I concealed myself in the embrasure of a window, and sought to discover her thoughts from her bearing. I studied the tactics of the mistress of the house, as she came and went, sat and chatted, beckoned to this one or that, asked questions, listened to the answers, as she leaned against the frame of the door; I detected a languid charm in her movements, a grace in the flutterings of her dress, remarked the nature of the feelings she so powerfully excited, and became very incredulous as to her virtue. If Fœdora would none of love to-day, she had had strong passions at some time; past experience of pleasure showed itself in the attitudes she chose in conversation, in her coquettish way of leaning against the panel behind her, she seemed scarcely able to stand alone, and yet ready for flight from too bold a glance. There was a kind of eloquence about her lightly folded arms, which, even for benevolent eyes, breathed sentiment. Her fresh red lips sharply contrasted with her brilliantly pale complexion. Her brown hair brought out all the golden color in her eyes, in which blue streaks

mingled as in Florentine marble; their expression seemed to increase the significance of her words. A studied grace lay in the charms of her bodice. Perhaps a rival might have found the lines of the thick eyebrows, which almost met, a little hard; or found a fault in the almost invisible down that covered her features. I saw the signs of passion everywhere, written on those Italian eyelids, on the splendid shoulders worthy of the Venus of Milo, on her features, in the darker shade of down above a somewhat thick under-lip. She was not merely a woman, but a romance. The whole blended harmony of lines, the feminine luxuriance of her frame, and its passionate promise, were subdued by a constant inexplicable reserve and modesty at variance with everything else about her. It needed an observation as keen as my own to detect such signs as these in her character. To explain myself more clearly; there were two women in Fœdora, divided perhaps by the line between head and body: the one, the head alone, seemed to be susceptible, and the other phlegmatic. She prepared her glance before she looked at you, something unspeakably mysterious, some inward convulsion seemed revealed by her glittering eyes.

"So, to be brief, either my imperfect moral science had left me a good deal to learn in the moral world, or a lofty soul dwelt in the countess, lent to her face those charms that fascinated and subdued us, and gave her an ascendency only the more complete because it comprehended a sympathy of desire.

"I went away completely enraptured with this woman, dazzled by the luxury around her, gratified in every faculty of my soul—noble and base, good and evil. When I felt myself so excited, eager, and elated, I thought I understood the attraction that drew thither those artists, diplomatists men in office, those stock-jobbers encased in triple brass. They came, no doubt, to find in her society the delirious emotion that now thrilled through every fibre in me, throbbing through my brain, setting the blood a-tingle in every vein, fretting even the tiniest nerve. And she had given herself to none, so as to

keep them all. A woman is a coquette so long as she knows not love.

"'Well,' I said to Rastignac, 'they married her, or sold her perhaps, to some old man, and recollections of her first marriage have caused her aversion for love.'

"I walked home from the Faubourg St. Honoré, where Fœdora lived. Almost all the breadth of Paris lies between her mansion and the Rue des Cordiers, but the distance seemed short, in spite of the cold. And I was to lay siege to Fœdora's heart, in winter, and a bitter winter, with only thirty francs in my possession, and such a distance as that lay between us! Only a poor man knows what such a passion costs in cab-hire, gloves, linen, tailor's bills, and the like. If the Platonic stage lasts a little too long, the affair grows ruinous. As a matter of fact, there is many a Lauzun among students of law, who finds it impossible to approach a lady-love living on a first floor. And I, sickly, thin, poorly dressed, wan and pale as any artist convalescent after a work, how could I compete with other young men, curled, handsome, smart, outcravatting Croatia; wealthy men, equipped with tilburys, and armed with assurance?

"'Bah, death or Fœdora!' I cried, as I went round by a bridge; 'my fortune lies in Fœdora.'

"That gothic boudoir and Louis Quatorze salon came before my eyes. I saw the countess again in her white dress with its large graceful sleeves, and all the fascinations of her form and movements. These pictures of Fœdora and her luxurious surroundings haunted me even in my bare, cold garret, when at last I reached it, as disheveled as any naturalist's wig. The contrast suggested evil counsel; in such a way crimes are conceived. I cursed my honest, self-respecting poverty, my garret where such teeming fancies had stirred within me. I trembled with fury, I reproached God, the devil, social conditions, my own father, the whole universe, indeed, with my fate and my misfortunes. I went hungry to bed, muttering ludicrous imprecations, but fully determined to win Fœdora. Her heart was my last ticket in the lottery, my fortune depended upon it.

"I spare you the history of my earlier visits, to reach the drama the sooner. In my efforts to appeal to her, I essayed to engage her intellect and her vanity on my side; in order to secure her love, I gave her any quantity of reasons for increasing her self-esteem; I never left her in a state of indifference; women like emotions at any cost, I gave them to her in plenty; I would rather have had her angry with me than indifferent.

"At first, urged by a strong will and a desire for her love, I assumed a little authority, but my own feelings grew stronger and mastered me; I relapsed into truth, I lost my head, and fell desperately in love.

"I am not very sure what we mean by the word love in our poetry and our talk; but I know that I have never found in all the ready rhetorical phrases of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in whose room perhaps I was lodging; nor among the feeble inventions of two centuries of our literature, nor in any picture that Italy has produced, a representation of the feelings that expanded all at once in my double nature. The view of the lake of Bienne, some music of Rossini's, the Madonna of Murillo's now in the possession of General Soult, Lescombat's letters, a few sayings scattered through collections of anecdotes; but most of all the prayers of religious ecstatics, and passages in our *fabliaux,*—these things alone have power to carry me back to the divine heights of my first love.

"Nothing expressed in human language, no thought reproducible in color, marble, sound, or articulate speech, could ever render the force, the truth, the completeness, the suddenness with which love awoke in me. To speak of art, is to speak of illusion. Love passes through endless transformations before it passes for ever into our existence and makes it glow with its own color of flame. The process is imperceptible, and baffles the artist's analysis. Its moans and complaints are tedious to an uninterested spectator. One would need to be very much in love to share the furious transports of Lovelace, as one reads *Clarissa Harlowe.* Love is like some fresh spring, that leaves its cresses, its gravel bed

and flowers, to become first a stream and then a river, changing its aspect and its nature as it flows to plunge itself in some boundless ocean, where restricted natures only find monotony, but where great souls are engulfed in endless contemplation.

"How can I dare to describe the hues of fleeting emotions, the nothings beyond all price, the spoken accents that beggar language, the looks that hold more than all the wealth of poetry? Not one of the mysterious scenes that draw us insensibly nearer and nearer to a woman, but has depths in it which can swallow up all the poetry that ever was written. How can the inner life and mystery that stirs in our souls penetrate through our glozes, when we have not even words to describe the visible and outward mysteries of beauty? What enchantment steeped me for how many hours in unspeakable rapture, filled with the sight of Her! What made me happy? I know not. That face of hers overflowed with light at such times; it seemed in some way to glow with it; the outlines of her face, with the scarcely perceptible down on its delicate surface, shone with a beauty belonging to the far distant horizon that melts into the sunlight. The light of day seemed to caress her as she mingled in it; rather it seemed that the light of her eyes was brighter than the daylight itself; or some shadow passing over that fair face made a kind of change there, altering its hues and its expression. Some thought would often seem to glow on her white brows; her eyes appeared to dilate, and her eyelids trembled; a smile rippled over her features; the living coral of her lips grew full of meaning as they closed and unclosed; an indistinguishable something in her hair made brown shadows on her fair temples: in each new phase Fœdora spoke. Every slight variation in her beauty made a new pleasure for my eyes, disclosed charms my heart had never known before; I tried to read a separate emotion or a hope in every change that passed over her face. This mute converse passed between soul and soul, like sound and aswering echo; and the short-lived delights then showered upon me have left indelible impressions

behind. Her voice would cause a frenzy in me that I could hardly understand. I could have copied the example of some prince of Lorraine, and held a live coal in the hollow of my hand, if her fingers passed caressingly through my hair the while. I felt no longer mere admiration and desire: I was under the spell; I had met my destiny. When back again under my own roof, I still vaguely saw Fœdora in her own home, and had some indefinable share in her life; if she felt ill, I suffered too. The next day I used to say to her:

"'You were not well yesterday.'

"How often has she not stood before me, called by the power of ecstasy, in the silence of the night! Sometimes she would break in upon me like a ray of light, make me drop my pen, and put science and study to flight in grief and alarm, as she compelled my admiration by the alluring pose I had seen but a short time before. Sometimes I went to seek her in the spirit world, and would bow down to her as to a hope, entreating her to let me hear the silver sounds of her voice, and I would wake at length in tears.

"Once, when she had promised to go to the theatre with me, she took it suddenly into her head to refuse to go out, and begged me to leave her alone. I was in such despair over the perversity which cost me a day's work, and (if I must confess it) my last shilling as well, that I went alone where she was to have been, desiring to see the play she had wished to see. I had scarcely seated myself when an electric shock went through me. A voice told me, 'She is here!' I looked round, and saw the countess hidden in the shadow at the back of her box in the first tier. My look did not waver; my eyes saw her at once with incredible clearness; my soul hovered about her life like an insect above its flower. How had my senses received this warning? There is something in these inward tremors that shallow people find astonishing, but the phenomena of our inner consciousness are produced as simply as those of external vision; so I was not surprised, but much vexed. My studies of our mental faculties, so little understood, helped me at any rate to find in my own excitement

some living proofs of my theories. There was something exceedingly odd in this combination of lover and man of science, of downright idolatry of a woman with the love of knowledge. The causes of the lover's despair were highly interesting to the man of science; and the exultant lover, on the other hand, put science far away from him in his joy. Fœdora saw me, and grew grave: I annoyed her. I went to her box during the first interval, and, finding her alone, I stayed there. Although we had not spoken of love, I foresaw an explanation. I had not told her my secret, still there was a kind of understanding between us. She used to tell me her plans for amusement, and on the previous evening had asked with friendly eagerness if I meant to call next day. After any witticism of hers, she would give me an inquiring glance, as if she had sought to please me alone by it. She would soothe me if I was vexed; and if she pouted, I had in some sort a right to ask an explanation. Before she would pardon any blunder, she would keep me a suppliant for long. All these things that we so relished, were so many lovers' quarrels. What arch grace she threw into it all! and what happiness it was to me!

"But now we stood before each other as strangers, with the close relation between us both suspended. The countess was glacial: a presentiment of trouble filled me.

" 'Will you come home with me?' she said, when the play was over.

"There had been a sudden change in the weather, and sleet was falling in showers as we went out. Fœdora's carriage was unable to reach the doorway of the theatre. At the sight of a well-dressed woman about to cross the street, a commissionaire held an umbrella above us, and stood waiting at the carriage-door for his tip. I would have given ten years of life just then for a couple of halfpence, but I had not a penny. All the man in me and all my vainest susceptibilities were wrung with an infernal pain. The words, 'I haven't a penny about me, my good fellow!' come from me in the hard voice of thwarted passion; and yet I was that man's brother

in misfortunes, as I knew too well; and once I had so lightly paid away seven hundred thousand francs! The footman pushed the man aside, and the horses sprang forward. As we returned, Fœdora, in real or feigned abstraction, answered all my questions curtly and by monosyllables. I said no more; it was a hateful moment. When we reached her house, we seated ourselves by the hearth, and when the servant had stirred the fire and left us alone, the countess turned to me with an inexplicable expression, and spoke. Her manner was almost solemn.

"'Since my return to France, more than one young man, tempted by my money, has made proposals to me which would have satisfied my pride. I have come across men, too, whose attachment was so deep and sincere that they might have married me even if they had found me the penniless girl I used to be. Besides these, Monsieur de Valentin, you must know that new titles and newly-acquired wealth have been also offered to me, and that I have never received again any of those who were so ill-advised as to mention love to me. If my regard for you was but slight, I would not give you this warning, which is dictated by friendship rather than by pride. A woman lays herself open to a rebuff of some kind, if she imagines herself to be loved, and declines, before it is uttered, to listen to language which in its nature implies a compliment. I am well acquainted with the parts played by Arsinoe and Araminta, and with the sort of answer I might look for under such circumstances; but I hope to-day that I shall not find myself misconstrued by a man of no ordinary character, because I have frankly spoken my mind.'

"She spoke with the cool self-possession of some attorney or solicitor explaining the nature of a contract or the conduct of a lawsuit to a client. There was not the least sign of feeling in the clear soft tones of her voice. Her steady face and dignified bearing seemed to me now full of diplomatic reserve and coldness. She had planned this scene, no doubt, and carefully chosen her words beforehand. Oh, my friend, there are women who take pleasure in piercing hearts, and deliberately

plunge the dagger back again into the wound; such women as these cannot but be worshiped, for such women either love or would fain be loved. A day comes when they make amends for all the pain they gave us; they repay us for the pangs, the keenness of which they recognize, in joys a hundred-fold, even as God, they tell us, recompenses our good works. Does not their perversity spring from the strength of their feelings? But to be so tortured by a woman, who slaughters you with indifference! was not the suffering hideous?

"Fœdora did not know it, but in that minute she trampled all my hopes beneath her feet; she maimed my life and she blighted my future with the cool indifference and unconscious barbarity of an inquisitive child who plucks its wings from a butterfly.

" 'Later on,' resumed Fœdora, 'you will learn, I hope, the stability of the affection that I keep for my friends. You will always find that I have devotion and kindness for them. I would give my life to serve my friends; but you could only despise me, if I allowed them to make love to me without return. That is enough. You are the only man to whom I have spoken such words as these last.'

"At first I could not speak, or master the tempest that arose within me; but I soon repressed my emotions in the depths of my soul, and began to smile.

" 'If I own that I love you,' I said, 'you will banish me at once; if I plead guilty to indifference, you will make me suffer for it. Women, magistrates, and priests never quite lay the gown aside. Silence is non-committal; be pleased then, madame, to approve my silence. You must have feared, in some degree, to lose me, or I should not have received this friendly admonition; and with that thought my pride ought to be satisfied. Let us banish all personal considerations. You are perhaps the only woman with whom I could discuss rationally a resolution so contrary to the laws of nature. Considered with regard to your species, you are a prodigy. Now let us investigate, in good faith, the causes of this psycho-

logical anomaly. Does there exist in you, as in many women, a certain pride in self, a love of your own loveliness, a refinement of egoism which makes you shudder at the idea of belonging to another; is it the thought of resigning your own will and submitting to a superiority, though only of convention, which displeases you? You would seem to me a thousand times the fairer for it. Can love formerly have brought you suffering? You probably set some value on your dainty figure and graceful appearance, and may perhaps wish to avoid the disfigurements of maternity. Is not this one of your strongest reasons for refusing a too importunate love? Some natural defect perhaps makes you insusceptible in spite of yourself? Do not be angry; my study, my inquiry is absolutely dispassionate. Some are born blind, and nature may easily have formed women who in like manner are blind, deaf, and dumb to love. You are really an interesting subject for medical investigation. You do not know your value. You feel perhaps a very legitimate distaste for mankind; in that I quite concur—to me they all seem ugly and detestable. And you are right,' I added, feeling my heart swell within me; 'how can you do otherwise than despise us? There is not a man living who is worthy of you.'

"I will not repeat all the biting words with which I ridiculed her. In vain; my bitterest sarcasms and keenest irony never made her wince nor elicited a sign of vexation. She heard me, with the customary smile upon her lips and in her eyes, the smile that she wore as a part of her clothing, and that never varied for friends, for mere acquaintances, or for strangers.

"'Isn't it very nice of me to allow you to dissect me like this?' she said at last, as I came to a temporary standstill, and looked at her in silence. 'You see,' she went on, laughing, 'that I have no foolish over-sensitiveness about my friendship. Many a woman would shut her door on you by way of punishing you for your impertinence.'

"'You could banish me without needing to give me the reasons for your harshness.' As I spoke I felt that I could kill her if she dismissed me.

" 'You are mad,' she said, smiling still.

" 'Did you never think,' I went on, 'of the effects of passionate love? A desperate man has often murdered his mistress.'

" 'It is better to die than to live in misery,' she said coolly. 'Such a man as that would run through his wife's money, desert her, and leave her at last in utter wretchedness.'

"This calm calculation dumfounded me. The gulf between us was made plain; we could never understand each other.

" 'Good-bye,' I said proudly.

" 'Good-bye, till to-morrow,' she answered, with a little friendly bow.

"For a moment's space I hurled at her in a glance all the love I must forego; she stood there with that banal smile of hers, the detestable chill smile of a marble statue, with none of the warmth in it that it seemed to express. Can you form any idea, my friend, of the pain that overcame me on the way home through rain and snow, across a league of icy-sheeted quays, without a hope left? Oh, to think that she not only had not guessed my poverty, but believed me to be as wealthy as she was, and likewise borne as softly over the rough ways of life! What failure and deceit! It was no mere question of money now, but of the fate of all that lay within me.

"I went at haphazard, going over the words of our strange conversation with myself. I got so thoroughly lost in my reflections that I ended by doubts as to the actual value of words and ideas. But I loved her all the same; I loved this woman with the untouched heart that might surrender at any moment—a woman who daily disappointed the expectations of the previous evening, by appearing as a new mistress on the morrow.

"As I passed under the gateway of the Institute, a fevered thrill ran through me. I remembered that I was fasting, and that I had not a penny. To complete the measure of my misfortune, my hat was spoiled by the rain. How was I to appear in the drawing-room of a woman of fashion with an

unpresentable hat? I had always cursed the inane and stupid custom that compels us to exhibit the lining of our hats, and to keep them always in our hands, but with anxious care I had so far kept mine in a precarious state of efficiency. It had been neither strikingly new, nor utterly shabby, neither napless nor over-glossy, and might have passed for the hat of a frugally given owner, but its artificially prolonged existence had now reached the final stage, it was crumpled, forlorn, and completely ruined, a downright rag, a fitting emblem of its master. My painfully preserved elegance must collapse for want of thirty *sous*.

"What unrecognized sacrifices I had made in the past three months for Fœdora! How often I had given the price of a week's sustenance to see her for a moment! To leave my work and go without food was the least of it! I must traverse the streets of Paris without getting splashed, run to escape showers, and reach her rooms at last, as neat and spruce as any of the coxcombs about her. For a poet and a distracted wooer the difficulties of this task were endless. My happiness, the course of my love, might be affected by a speck of mud upon my only white waistcoat! Oh, to miss the sight of her because I was wet through and bedraggled, and had not so much as five *sous* to give to a shoeblack for removing the least little spot of mud from my boot! The petty pangs of these nameless torments, which an irritable man finds so great, only strengthened my passion.

"The unfortunate must make sacrifices which they may not mention to women who lead refined and luxurious lives. Such women see things through a prism that gilds all men and their surroundings. Egoism leads them to take cheerful views, and fashion makes them cruel; they do not wish to reflect, lest they lose their happiness, and the absorbing nature of their pleasures absolves their indifference to the misfortunes of others. A penny never means millions to them; millions, on the contrary, seem a mere trifle. Perhaps love must plead his cause by great sacrifices, but a veil must be lightly drawn across them, they must go down into silence.

So when wealthy men pour out their devotion, their fortunes, and their lives, they gain somewhat by these commonly entertained opinions, an additional lustre hangs about their lovers' follies; their silence is eloquent; there is a grace about the drawn veil; but my terrible distress bound me over to suffer fearfully or ever I might speak of my love or of dying for her sake.

"Was it a sacrifice after all? Was I not richly rewarded by the joy I took in sacrificing everything to her? There was no commonest event of my daily life to which the countess had not given importance, had not overfilled with happiness. I had been hitherto careless of my clothes, now I respected my coat as if it had been a second self. I should not have hesitated between bodily harm and a tear in that garment. You must enter wholly into my circumstances to understand the stormy thoughts, the gathering frenzy, that shook me as I went, and which, perhaps, were increased by my walk. I gloated in an infernal fashion which I cannot describe over the absolute completeness of my wretchedness. I would have drawn from it an augury of my future, but there is no limit to the possibilities of misfortune. The door of my lodging-house stood ajar. A light streamed from the heart-shaped opening cut in the shutters. Pauline and her mother were sitting up for me and talking. I heard my name spoken, and listened.

"'Raphael is much nicer-looking than the student in number seven,' said Pauline; 'his fair hair is such a pretty color. Don't you think there is something in his voice, too, I don't know what it is, that gives you a sort of thrill? And, then, though he may be a little proud, he is very kind, and he has such fine manners; I am sure that all the ladies must be quite wild about him.'

"'You might be fond of him yourself, to hear you talk,' was Madame Gaudin's comment.

"'He is just as dear to me as a brother,' she laughed. 'I should be finely ungrateful if I felt no friendship for him. Didn't he teach me music and drawing and grammar, and

everything I know in fact? You don't much notice how I get on, dear mother; but I shall know enough, in a while, to give lessons myself, and then we can keep a servant.'

"I stole away softly, made some noise outside, and went into their room to take the lamp, that Pauline tried to light for me. The dear child had just poured soothing balm into my wounds. Her outspoken admiration had given me fresh courage. I so needed to believe in myself and to come by a just estimate of my advantages. This revival of hope in me perhaps colored my surroundings. Perhaps also I had never before really looked at the picture that so often met my eyes, of the two women in their room; it was a scene such as Flemish painters have reproduced so faithfully for us, that I admired in its delightful reality. The mother, with the kind smile upon her lips, sat knitting stockings by the dying fire; Pauline was painting hand-screens, her brushes and paints, strewn over the tiny table, made bright spots of color for the eye to dwell on. When she had left her seat and stood lighting my lamp, one must have been under the yoke of a terrible passion indeed, not to admire her faintly flushed transparent hands, the girlish charm of her attitude, the ideal grace of her head, as the lamplight fell full on her pale face. Night and silence added to the charms of this industrious vigil and peaceful interior. The light-heartedness that sustained such continuous toil could only spring from devout submission and the lofty feelings that it brings.

"There was an indescribable harmony between them and their possessions. The splendor of Fœdora's home did not satisfy; it called out all my worst instincts; something in this lowly poverty and unfeigned goodness revived me. It may have been that luxury abased me in my own eyes, while here my self-respect was restored to me, as I sought to extend the protection that a man is so eager to make felt, over these two women, who in the bare simplicity of the existence in their brown room seemed to live wholly in the feelings of their hearts. As I came up to Pauline, she looked at me in an almost motherly way; her hands shook a little as she held the lamp, so that the light fell on me, and cried:

" 'Dieu! how pale you are! and you are wet through! My mother will try to wipe you dry. Monsieur Raphael,' she went on, after a little pause, 'you are so very fond of milk, and to-night we happen to have some cream. Here, will you not take some?'

"She pounced like a kitten, on a china bowl full of milk. She did it so quickly, and put it before me so prettily, that I hesitated.

" 'You are going to refuse me?' she said, and her tones changed.

"The pride in each felt for the other's pride. It was Pauline's poverty that seemed to humiliate her, and to reproach me with my want of consideration, and I melted at once and accepted the cream that might have been meant for her morning's breakfast. The poor child tried not to show her joy, but her eyes sparkled.

" 'I needed it badly,' I said as I sat down. (An anxious look passed over her face.) 'Do you remember that passage, Pauline, where Bossuet tells how God gave more abundant reward for a cup of cold water than for a victory?'

" 'Yes,' she said, her heart beating like some wild bird's in a child's hands.

" 'Well, as we shall part very soon, now,' I went on in an unsteady voice, 'you must let me show my gratitude to you and to your mother for all the care you have taken of me.'

" 'Oh, don't let us cast accounts,' she said, laughing. But her laughter covered an agitation that gave me pain. I went on without appearing to hear her words:

" 'My piano is one of Erard's best instruments; and you must take it. Pray accept it without hesitation; I really could not take it with me on the journey I am about to make.'

"Perhaps the melancholy tones in which I spoke enlightened the two women, for they seemed to understand, and eyed me with curiosity and alarm. Here was the affection that I had looked for in the glacial regions of the great

world, true affection, unostentatious but tender, and possibly lasting.

"'Don't take it to heart so,' the mother said; 'stay on here. My husband is on his way towards us even now,' she went on. 'I looked into the Gospel of St. John this evening while Pauline hung our door-key in a Bible from her fingers. The key turned; that means that Gaudin is in health and doing well. Pauline began again for you and for the young man in number seven—it turned for you, but not for him. We are all going to be rich. Gaudin will come back a millionaire. I dreamed once that I saw him in a ship full of serpents; luckily the water was rough, and that means gold or precious stones from over-sea.'

"The silly, friendly words were like the crooning lullaby with which a mother soothes her sick child; they in a manner calmed me. There was a pleasant heartiness in the worthy woman's looks and tones, which, if it could not remove trouble, at any rate soothed and quieted it, and deadened the pain. Pauline, keener-sighted than her mother, studied me uneasily; her quick eyes seemed to read my life and my future. I thanked the mother and daughter by an inclination of the head, and hurried away; I was afraid I should break down.

"I found myself alone under my roof, and laid myself down in my misery. My unhappy imagination suggested numberless baseless projects, and prescribed impossible resolutions. When a man is struggling in the wreck of his fortunes, he is not quite without resources, but I was engulfed. Ah, my dear fellow, we are too ready to blame the wretched. Let us be less harsh on the results of the most powerful of all social solvents. Where poverty is absolute there exist no such things as shame or crime, or virtue or intelligence. I knew not what to do; I was as defenceless as a maiden on her knees before a beast of prey. A penniless man who has no ties to bind him is master of himself at any rate, but a luckless wretch who is in love no longer belongs to himself, and may not take his own life. Love makes us almost sacred

in our own eyes; it is the life of another that we revere within us; then and so begins for us the cruelest trouble of all—the misery with a hope in it, a hope for which we must even bear our torments. I thought I would go to Rastignac on the morrow to confide Fœdora's strange resolution to him, and with that I slept.

"'Ah, ha!' cried Rastignac, as he saw me enter his lodging at nine o'clock in the morning. 'I know what brings you here. Fœdora has dismissed you. Some kind souls, who were jealous of your ascendency over the countess, gave out that you were going to be married. Heaven only knows what follies your rivals have equipped you with, and what slanders have been directed at you.'

"'That explains everything!' I exclaimed. I remembered all my presumptuous speeches, and gave the countess credit for no little magnanimity. It pleased me to think that I was a miscreant who had not been punished nearly enough, and I saw nothing in her indulgence but the long-suffering charity of love.

"'Not quite so fast,' urged the prudent Gascon; 'Fœdora has all the sagacity natural to a profoundly selfish woman; perhaps she may have taken your measure while you still coveted only her money and her splendor; in spite of all your care, she could have read you through and through. She can dissemble far too well to let any dissimulation pass undetected. I fear,' he went on, 'that I have brought you into a bad way. In spite of her cleverness and her tact, she seems to me a domineering sort of person, like every woman who can only feel pleasure through her brain. Happiness for her lies entirely in a comfortable life and in social pleasures; her sentiment is only assumed; she will make you miserable; you will be her head footman.'

"He spoke to the deaf. I broke in upon him, disclosing, with an affectation of light-heartedness, the state of my finances.

"'Yesterday evening,' he rejoined, 'luck ran against me, and that carried off all my available cash. But for that

trivial mishap, I would gladly have shared my purse with you. But let us go and breakfast at the restaurant; perhaps there is good counsel in oysters.'

"He dressed, and had his tilbury brought round. We went to the Café de Paris like a couple of millionaires, armed with all the audacious impertinence of the speculator whose capital is imaginary. That devil of a Gascon quite disconcerted me by the coolness of his manners and his absolute self-possession. While we were taking coffee after an excellent and well-ordered repast, a young dandy entered, who did not escape Rastignac. He had been nodding here and there among the crowd to this or that young man, distinguished both by personal attractions and elegant attire, and now he said to me:

"'Here's your man,' as he beckoned to this gentleman with a wonderful cravat, who seemed to be looking for a table that suited his ideas.

"'That rogue has been decorated for bringing out books that he doesn't understand a word of,' whispered Rastignac; 'he is a chemist, a historian, a novelist, and a political writer; he has gone halves, thirds, or quarters in the authorship of I don't know how many plays, and he is as ignorant as Dom Miguel's mule. He is not a man so much as a name, a label that the public is familiar with. So he would do well to avoid shops inscribed with the motto, *"Ici l'on peut écrire soi-même."* He is acute enough to deceive an entire congress of diplomatists. In a couple of words, he is a moral half-caste, not quite a fraud, nor entirely genuine. But, hush! he has succeeded already; nobody asks anything further, and every one calls him an illustrious man.'

"'Well, my esteemed and excellent friend, and how may Your Intelligence be?' So Rastignac addressed the stranger as he sat down at a neighboring table.

"'Neither well nor ill; I am overwhelmed with work. I have all the necessary materials for some very curious historical memoirs in my hands, and I cannot find any one

to whom I can ascribe them. It worries me, for I shall have to be quick about it. Memoirs are falling out of fashion.'

"'What are the memoirs—contemporaneous, ancient, or memoirs of the court, or what?'

"'They relate to the Necklace affair.'

"'Now, isn't that a coincidence?' said Rastignac, turning to me and laughing. He looked again to the literary speculation, and said, indicating me:

"'This is M. de Valentin, one of my friends, whom I must introduce to you as one of our future literary celebrities. He had formerly an aunt, a marquise, much in favor once at court, and for about two years he has been writing a Royalist history of the Revolution.'

"Then, bending over this singular man of business, he went on:

"'He is a man of talent, and a simpleton that will do your memoirs for you, in his aunt's name, for a hundred crowns a volume.'

"'It's a bargain,' said the other, adjusting his cravat. 'Waiter, my oysters.'

"'Yes, but you must give me twenty-five louis as commission, and you will pay him in advance for each volume,' said Rastignac.

"'No, no. He shall only have fifty crowns on account, and then I shall be sure of having my manuscript punctually.'

"Rastignac repeated this business conversation to me in low tones; and then, without giving me any voice in the matter, he replied:

"'We agree to your proposal. When can we call upon you to arrange the affair?'

"'Oh, well! Come and dine here to-morrow at seven o'clock.'

"We rose. Rastignac flung some money to the waiter, put the bill in his pocket, and we went out. I was quite stupefied by the flippancy and ease with which he had sold my venerable aunt, la Marquise de Montbauron.

"'I would sooner take ship for the Brazils, and give the Indians lessons in algebra, though I don't know a word of it, than tarnish my family name.'

"Rastignac burst out laughing.

"'How dense you are! Take the fifty crowns in the first instance, and write the memoirs. When you have finished them, you will decline to publish them in your aunt's name, imbecile! Madame de Montbauron, with her hooped petticoat, her rank and beauty, rouge and slippers, and her death upon the scaffold, is worth a great deal more than six hundred francs. And then, if the trade will not give your aunt her due, some old adventurer, or some shady countess or other, will be found to put her name to the memoirs.'

"'Oh,' I groaned; 'why did I quit the blameless life in my garret? This world has aspects that are very vilely dishonorable.'

"'Yes,' said Rastignac, 'that is all very poetical, but this is a matter of business. What a child you are! Now, listen to me. As to your work, the public will decide upon it; and as for my literary middle-man, hasn't he devoted eight years of his life to obtaining a footing in the book-trade, and paid heavily for his experience? You divide the money and the labor of the book with him very unequally, but isn't yours the better part? Twenty-five louis means as much to you as a thousand francs does to him. Come, you can write historical memoirs, a work of art such as never was, since Diderot once wrote six sermons for a hundred crowns?'

"'After all,' I said, in agitation, 'I cannot choose but do it. So, my dear friend, my thanks are due to you. I shall be quite rich with twenty-five louis.'

"'Richer than you think,' he laughed. 'If I have my commission from Finot in this matter, it goes to you, can't you see? Now let us go to the Bois de Boulogne,' he said; 'we shall see your countess there, and I will show you the pretty little widow that I am to marry—a charming woman, an Alsacienne, rather plump. She reads Kant, Schiller, Jean Paul, and a host of lachrymose books. She has a

mania for continually asking my opinion, and I have to look as if I entered into all this German sensibility, and to know a pack of ballads—drugs, all of them, that my doctor absolutely prohibits. As yet I have not been able to wean her from her literary enthusiasms; she sheds torrents of tears as she reads Goethe, and I have to weep a little myself to please her, for she has an income of fifty thousand livres, my dear boy, and the prettiest little hand and foot in the world. Oh, if she would only say *mon ange* and *brouiller* instead of *mon anche* and *prouiller,* she would be perfection!'

"We saw the countess, radiant amid the splendors of her equipage. The coquette bowed very graciously to us both, and the smile she gave me seemed to me to be divine and full of love. I was very happy; I fancied myself beloved; I had money, a wealth of love in my heart, and my troubles were over. I was light-hearted, blithe, and content. I found my friend's lady-love charming. Earth and air and heaven —all nature—seemed to reflect Fœdora's smile for me.

"As we returned through the Champs-Elyseés, we paid a visit to Rastignac's hatter and tailor. Thanks to the 'Necklace,' my insignificant peace-footing was to end, and I made formidable preparations for a campaign. Henceforward I need not shrink from a contest with the spruce and fashionable young men who made Fœdora's circle. I went home, locked myself in, and stood by my dormer window, outwardly calm enough, but in reality I bade a last good-bye to the roofs without. I began to live in the future, rehearsed my life drama, and discounted love and its happiness. Ah, how stormy life can grow to be within the four walls of a garret! The soul within us is like a fairy; she turns straw into diamonds for us; and for us, at a touch of her wand, enchanted palaces arise, as flowers in the meadows spring up towards the sun.

"Towards noon, next day, Pauline knocked gently at my door, and brought me—who could guess it?—a note from Fœdora. The countess asked me to take her to the Luxembourg, and to go thence to see with her the Museum and Jardin des Plantes.

"'The man is waiting for an answer,' said Pauline, after quietly waiting for a moment.

"I hastily scrawled my acknowledgments, and Pauline took the note. I changed my dress. When my toilette was ended, and I looked at myself with some complaisance, an icy shiver ran through me as I thought:

"'Will Fœdora walk or drive? Will it rain or shine?—No matter, though,' I said to myself; 'whichever it is, can one ever reckon with feminine caprice? She will have no money about her, and will want to give a dozen francs to some little Savoyard because his rags are picturesque.'

"I had not a brass farthing, and should have no money till the evening came. How dearly a poet pays for the intellectual prowess that method and toil have brought him, at such crises of our youth! Innumerable painfully vivid thoughts pierced me like barbs. I looked out of my window; the weather was very unsettled. If things fell out badly, I might easily hire a cab for the day; but would not the fear lie on me every moment that I might not meet Finot in the evening? I felt too weak to endure such fears in the midst of my felicity. Though I felt sure that I should find nothing, I began a grand search through my room; I looked for imaginary coins in the recesses of my mattress; I hunted about everywhere—I even shook out my old boots. A nervous fever seized me; I looked with wild eyes at the furniture when I had ransacked it all. Will you understand, I wonder, the excitement that possessed me when, plunged deep in the listlessness of despair, I opened my writing-table drawer, and found a fair and splendid ten-franc piece that shone like a rising star, new and sparkling, and slily hiding in a cranny between two boards? I did not try to account for its previous reserve and the cruelty of which it had been guilty in thus lying hidden; I kissed it for a friend faithful in adversity, and hailed it with a cry that found an echo, and made me turn sharply, to find Pauline with a face grown white.

"'I thought,' she faltered, 'that you had hurt yourself! The man who brought the letter——' (she broke off as if

something smothered her voice). 'But mother has paid him,' she added, and flitted away like a wayward, capricious child. Poor little one! I wanted her to share my happiness. I seemed to have all the happiness in the world within me just then; and I would fain have returned to the unhappy, all that I felt as if I had stolen from them.

"The intuitive perception of adversity is sound for the most part; the countess had sent away her carriage. One of those freaks that pretty women can scarcely explain to themselves had determined her to go on foot, by way of the boulevards, to the Jardin des Plantes.

"'It will rain,' I told her, and it pleased her to contradict me.

"As it fell out, the weather was fine while we went through the Luxembourg; when we came out, some drops fell from a great cloud, whose progress I had watched uneasily, and we took a cab. At the Museum I was about to dismiss the vehicle, and Fœdora (what agonies!) asked me not to do so. But it was like a dream in broad daylight for me, to chat with her, to wander in the Jardin des Plantes, to stray down the shady alleys, to feel her hand upon my arm; the secret transports repressed in me were reduced, no doubt, to a fixed and foolish smile upon my lips; there was something unreal about it all. Yet in all her movements, however alluring, whether we stood or whether we walked, there was nothing either tender or lover-like. When I tried to share in a measure the action of movement prompted by her life, I became aware of a check, or of something strange in her that I cannot explain, of an inner activity concealed in her nature. There is no suavity about the movements of women who have no soul in them. Our wills were opposed, and we did not keep step together. Words are wanting to describe this outward dissonance between two beings; we are not accustomed to read a thought in a movement. We instinctively feel this phenomenon of our nature, but it cannot be expressed.

"I did not dissect my sensations during those violent seizures of passion," Raphael went on, after a moment of

silence, as if he were replying to an objection raised by himself. "I did not analyze my pleasures nor count my heart-beats then, as a miser scrutinizes and weighs his gold pieces. No; experience sheds its melancholy light over the events of the past to-day, and memory brings these pictures back, as the sea-waves in fair weather cast up fragment after fragment of the débris of a wrecked vessel upon the strand.

"'It is in your power to render me a rather important service,' said the countess, looking at me in an embarrassed way. 'After confiding to you my aversion for lovers, I feel myself more at liberty to entreat your good offices in the name of friendship. Will there not be very much more merit in obliging me to-day?' she asked, laughing.

"I looked at her in anguish. Her manner was coaxing, but in no wise affectionate; she felt nothing for me; she seemed to be playing a part, and I thought her a consummate actress. Then all at once my hopes awoke once more, at a single look and word. Yet if reviving love expressed itself in my eyes, she bore its light without any change in the clearness of her own; they seemed, like a tiger's eyes, to have a sheet of metal behind them. I used to hate her in such moments.

"'The influence of the Duc de Navarreins would be very useful to me, with an all-powerful person in Russia,' she went on, persuasion in every modulation of her voice, 'whose intervention I need in order to have justice done me in a matter the concerns both my fortune and my position in the world, that is to say, the recognition of my marriage by the Emperor. Is not the Duc de Navarreins a cousin of yours? A letter from him would settle everything.'

"'I am yours,' I answered; 'command me.'

"'You are very nice,' she said, pressing my hand. 'Come and have dinner with me, and I will tell you everything, as if you were my confessor.'

"So this discreet, suspicious woman, who had never been heard to speak a word about her affairs to any one, was going to consult me.

"'Oh, how dear to me is this silence that you have imposed on me!' I cried; 'but I would rather have had some sharper ordeal still.' And she smiled upon the intoxication in my eyes; she did not reject my admiration in any way; surely she loved me!

"Fortunately, my purse held just enough to satisfy her cabman. The day spent in her house, alone with her, was delicious; it was the first time that I had seen her in this way. Hitherto we had always been kept apart by the presence of others, and by her formal politeness and reserved manners, even during her magnificent dinners; but now it was as if I lived beneath her own roof—I had her all to myself, so to speak. My wandering fancy broke down barriers, arranged the events of life to my liking, and steeped me in happiness and love. I seemed to myself her husband, I liked to watch her busied with little details; it was a pleasure to me even to see her take off her bonnet and shawl. She left me alone for a little, and came back, charming, with her hair newly arranged; and this dainty change of toilette had been made for me!

"During the dinner she lavished attention upon me, and put charm without end into those numberless trifles to all seeming, that make up half of our existence nevertheless. As we sat together before a crackling fire, on silken cushions surrounded by the most desirable creations of Oriental luxury; as I saw this woman whose famous beauty made every heart beat, so close to me; an unapproachable woman who was talking and bringing all her powers of coquetry to bear upon me; then my blissful pleasure rose almost to the point of suffering. To my vexation, I recollected the important business to be concluded; I determined to go to keep the appointment made for me for this evening.

"'So soon?' she said, seeing me take my hat.

"She loved me, then! or I thought so at least, from the bland tones in which those two words were uttered. I would then have bartered a couple of years of life for every hour she chose to grant to me, and so prolong my ecstasy. My

happiness was increased by the extent of the money I sacrificed. It was midnight before she dismissed me. But on the morrow, for all that, my heroism cost me a good many remorseful pangs; I was afraid the affair of the Memoirs, now of such importance for me, might have fallen through, and rushed off to Rastignac. We found the nominal author of my future labors just getting up.

"Finot read over a brief agreement to me, in which nothing whatever was said about my aunt, and when it had been signed he paid me down fifty crowns, and the three of us breakfasted together. I had only thirty francs left over, when I had paid for my new hat, for sixty tickets at thirty sous each, and settled my debts; but for some days to come the difficulties of living were removed. If I had but listened to Rastignac, I might have had abundance by frankly adopting the 'English system.' He really wanted to establish my credit by setting me to raise loans, on the theory that borrowing is the basis of credit. To hear him talk, the future was the largest and most secure kind of capital in the world. My future luck was hypothecated for the benefit of my creditors, and he gave my custom to his tailor, an artist, and a young man's tailor, who was to leave me in peace until I married.

"The monastic life of study that I had led for three years past ended on this day. I frequented Fœdora's house very diligently, and tried to outshine the heroes or the swaggerers to be found in her circle. When I believed that I had left poverty for ever behind me, I regained my freedom of mind, humiliated my rivals, and was looked upon as a very attractive, dazzling, and irresistible sort of man. But acute folk used to say with regard to me, 'A fellow as clever as that will keep all his enthusiasms in his brain,' and charitably extolled my faculties at the expense of my feelings. 'Isn't he lucky, not to be in love!' they exclaimed. 'If he were, could he be so light-hearted and animated?' Yet in Fœdora's presence I was as dull as love could make me. When I was alone with her, I had not a word to say, or if I did speak, I renounced

love; and I affected gaiety but ill, like a courtier who has a bitter mortification to hide. I tried in every way to make myself indispensable in her life, and necessary to her vanity and to her comfort; I was a plaything at her pleasure, a slave always at her side. And when I had frittered away the day in this way, I went back to my work at night, securing merely two or three hours' sleep in the early morning.

"But I had not, like Rastignac, the 'English system' at my finger-ends, and I very soon saw myself without a penny. I fell at once into that precarious way of life which industriously hides cold and miserable depths beneath an elusive surface of luxury; I was a coxcomb without conquests, a penniless fop, a nameless gallant. The old sufferings were renewed, but less sharply; no doubt I was growing used to the painful crisis. Very often my sole diet consisted of the scanty provision of cakes and tea that is offered in drawing-rooms, or one of the countess' great dinners must sustain me for two whole days. I used all my time, and exerted every effort and all my powers of observation, to penetrate the impenetrable character of Fœdora. Alternate hope and despair had swayed my opinions; for me she was sometimes the tenderest, sometimes the most unfeeling of women. But these transitions from joy to sadness became unendurable; I sought to end the horrible conflict within me by extinguishing love. By the light of warning gleams my soul sometimes recognized the gulfs that lay between us. The countess confirmed all my fears; I had never yet detected any tear in her eyes; an affecting scene in a play left her smiling and unmoved. All her instincts were selfish; she could not divine another's joy or sorrow. She had made a fool of me, in fact!

"I had rejoiced over a sacrifice to make for her, and almost humiliated myself in seeking out my kinsman, the Duc de Navarreins, a selfish man who was ashamed of my poverty, and had injured me too deeply not to hate me. He received me with the polite coldness that makes every word and gesture seem an insult; he looked so ill at ease that I pitied

him. I blushed for this pettiness amid grandeur, and penuriousness surrounded by luxury. He began to talk to me of his heavy losses in the three per cents, and then I told him the object of my visit. The change in his manners, hitherto glacial, which now gradually became affectionate, disgusted me.

"Well, he called upon the countess, and completely eclipsed me with her.

"On him Fœdora exercised spells and witcheries unheard of; she drew him into her power, and arranged her whole mysterious business with him; I was left out, I heard not a word of it; she had made a tool of me! She did not seem to be aware of my existence while my cousin was present; she received me less cordially perhaps than when I was first presented to her. One evening she chose to mortify me before the duke by a look, a gesture, that it is useless to try to express in words. I went away with tears in my eyes, planning terrible and outrageous schemes of vengeance without end.

"I often used to go with her to the theatre. Love utterly absorbed me as I sat beside her; as I looked at her I used to give myself up to the pleasure of listening to the music, putting all my soul into the double joy of love and of hearing every emotion of my heart translated into musical cadences. It was my passion that filled the air and the stage, that was triumphant everywhere, but with my mistress. Then I would take Fœdora's hand. I used to scan her features and her eyes, imploring of them some indication that one blended feeling possessed us both, seeking for the sudden harmony awakened by the power of music, which makes our souls vibrate in unison; but her hand was passive, her eyes said nothing.

"When the fire that burned in me glowed too fiercely from the face I turned upon her, she met it with that studied smile of hers, the conventional expression that sits on the lips of every portrait in every exhibition. She was not listening to the music. The divine pages of Rossini, Cimarosa, or

Zingarelli called up no emotion, gave no voice to any poetry in her life; her soul was a desert.

"Fœdora presented herself as a drama before a drama. Her lorgnette traveled restlessly over the boxes; she was restless too beneath the apparent calm; fashion tyrannized over her; her box, her bonnet, her carriage, her own personality absorbed her entirely. My merciless knowledge thoroughly tore away all my illusions. If good breeding consists in self-forgetfulness and consideration for others, in constantly showing gentleness in voice and bearing, in pleasing others, and in making them content in themselves, all traces of her plebeian origin were not yet obliterated in Fœdora, in spite of her cleverness. Her self-forgetfulness was a sham, her manners were not innate but painfully acquired, her politeness was rather subservient. And yet for those she singled out, her honeyed words expressed natural kindness, her pretentious exaggeration was exalted enthusiasm. I alone had scrutinized her grimacings, and stripped away the thin rind that sufficed to conceal her real nature from the world; her trickery no longer deceived me; I had sounded the depths of that feline nature. I blushed for her when some donkey or other flattered and complimented her. And yet I loved her through it all! I hoped that her snows would melt with the warmth of a poet's love. If I could only have made her heart capable of a woman's tenderness, if I could have made her feel all the greatness that lies in devotion, then I should have seen her perfected, she would have been an angel. I loved her as a man, a lover, and an artist; if it had been necessary not to love her so that I might win her, some cool-headed coxcomb, some self-possessed calculator would perhaps have had the advantage over me. She was so vain and sophisticated, that the language of vanity would appeal to her; she would have allowed herself to be taken in the toils of an intrigue; a hard, cold nature would have gained a complete ascendency over her. Keen grief had pierced me to my very soul, as she unconsciously revealed her absolute love of self. I seemed to see her as she one day would be, alone

in the world, with no one to whom she could stretch her hand, with no friendly eyes for her own to meet and rest upon. I was bold enough to set this before her one evening; I painted in vivid colors her lonely, sad, deserted old age. Her comment on this prospect of so terrible a revenge of thwarted nature was horrible.

"'I shall always have money,' she said; 'and with money we can always inspire such sentiments as are necessary for our comfort in those about us.'

"I went away confounded by the arguments of luxury, by the reasoning of this woman, of the world in which she lived; and blamed myself for my infatuated idolatry. I myself had not loved Pauline because she was poor; and had not the wealthy Fœdora a right to repulse Raphael? Conscience is our unerring judge until we finally stifle it. A specious voice said within me, 'Fœdora is neither attracted to nor repulses any one; she has her liberty, but once upon a time she sold herself to the Russian count, her husband or her lover, for gold. But temptation is certain to enter into her life. Wait till that moment comes!' She lived remote from humanity, in a sphere apart, in a hell or a heaven of her own; she was neither frail nor virtuous. This feminine enigma in embroideries and cashmeres had brought into play every emotion of the human heart in me—pride, ambition, love, curiosity.

"There was a craze just then for praising a play at a little Boulevard theatre, prompted perhaps by a wish to appear original that besets us all, or due to some freak of fashion. The countess showed some signs of a wish to see the floured face of the actor who had so delighted several people of taste, and I obtained the honor of taking her to a first representation of some wretched farce or other. A box scarcely cost five francs, but I had not a brass farthing. I was but half-way through the volume of Memoirs; I dared not beg for assistance of Finot, and Rastignac, my providence, was away. These constant perplexities were the bane of my life.

"We had once come out of the theatre when it was raining heavily; Fœdora had called a cab for me before I could escape from her show of concern; she would not admit any of my excuses—my liking for wet weather, and my wish to go to the gaming-table. She did not read my poverty in my embarrassed attitude, nor in my forced jests. My eyes would redden, but she did not understand a look. A young man's life is at the mercy of the strangest whims! At every revolution of the wheels during the journey, thoughts that burned stirred in my heart. I tried to pull up a plank from the bottom of the vehicle, hoping to slip through the hole into the street; but finding insuperable obstacles, I burst into a fit of laughter, and then sat stupefied in calm dejection, like a man in the pillory. When I reached my lodging, Pauline broke in through my first stammering words with:

"'If you haven't any money——?'

"Ah, the music of Rossini was as nothing compared with those words. But to return to the performance at the Funambules.

"I thought of pawning the circlet of gold round my mother's portrait in order to escort the countess. Although the pawnbroker loomed in my thoughts as one of the doors of a convict's prison, I would rather myself have carried my bed thither than have begged for alms. There is something so painful in the expression of a man who asks money of you! There are loans that mulct us of our self-respect, just as some rebuffs from a friend's lips sweep away our last illusion.

"Pauline was working; her mother had gone to bed. I flung a stealthy glance over the bed; the curtains were drawn back a little; Madame Gaudin was in a deep sleep, I thought, when I saw her quiet, sallow profile outlined against the pillow.

"'You are in trouble?' Pauline said, dipping her brush into the coloring.

"'It is in your power to do me a great service, my dear child,' I answered.

"The gladness in her eyes frightened me.

" 'Is it possible that she loves me?' I thought. 'Pauline,' I began. I went and sat near to her, so as to study her. My tones had been so searching that she read my thought; her eyes fell, and I scrutinized her face. It was so pure and frank that I fancied I could see as clearly into her heart as into my own.

" 'Do you love me?' I asked.

" 'A little,—passionately—not a bit!' she cried.

"Then she did not love me. Her jesting tones, and a little gleeful movement that escaped her, expressed nothing beyond a girlish, blithe goodwill. I told her about my distress and the predicament in which I found myself, and asked her to help me.

" 'You do not wish to go to the pawnbroker's yourself, M. Raphael,' she answered, 'and yet you would send me!'

"I blushed in confusion at the child's reasoning. She took my hand in hers as if she wanted to compensate for this home-truth by her light touch upon it.

" 'Oh, I would willingly go,' she said, 'but it is not necessary. I found two five-franc pieces at the back of the piano, that had slipped without your knowledge between the frame and the keyboard, and I laid them on your table.'

" 'You will soon be coming into some money, M. Raphael,' said the kind mother, showing her face between the curtains, 'and I can easily lend you a few crowns meanwhile.'

" 'Oh, Pauline!' I cried, as I pressed her hand, 'how I wish that I were rich!'

" 'Bah! why should you?' she said petulantly. Her hand shook in mine with the throbbing of her pulse; she snatched it away, and looked at both of mine.

" 'You will marry a rich wife,' she said, 'but she will give you a great deal of trouble. Ah, Dieu! she will be your death,—I am sure of it.'

"In her exclamation there was something like belief in her mother's absurd superstitions.

" 'You are very credulous, Pauline!'

"'The woman whom you will love is going to kill you —there is no doubt of it,' she said, looking at me with alarm.

"She took up her brush again and dipped it in the color; her great agitation was evident; she looked at me no longer. I was ready to give credence just then to superstitious fancies; no man is utterly wretched so long as he is superstitious; a belief of that kind is often in reality a hope.

"I found that those two magnificent five-franc pieces were lying, in fact, upon my table when I reached my room. During the first confused thoughts of early slumber, I tried to audit my accounts so as to explain this unhoped-for windfall; but I lost myself in useless calculations, and slept. Just as I was leaving my room to engage a box the next morning, Pauline came to see me.

"'Perhaps your ten francs is not enough,' said the amiable, kind-hearted girl; 'my mother told me to offer you this money. Take it, please, take it!'

"She laid three crowns upon the table, and tried to escape, but I would not let her go. Admiration dried the tears that sprang to my eyes.

"'You are an angel, Pauline,' I said. 'It is not the loan that touches me so much as the delicacy with which it is offered. I used to wish for a rich wife, a fashionable woman of rank; and now, alas! I would rather possess millions, and find some girl, as poor as you are, with a generous nature like your own; and I would renounce a fatal passion which will kill me. Perhaps what you told me will come true.'

"'That is enough,' she said, and fled away; the fresh trills of her birdlike voice rang up the staircase.

"'She is very happy in not yet knowing love,' I said to myself, thinking of the torments I had endured for many months past.

"Pauline's fifteen francs were invaluable to me. Fœdora, thinking of the stifling odor of the crowded place where we were to spend several hours, was sorry that she had not brought a bouquet; I went in search of flowers for her, as

I had laid already my life and my fate at her feet. With a pleasure in which compunction mingled, I gave her a bouquet. I learned from its price the extravagance of superficial gallantry in the world. But very soon she complained of the heavy scent of a Mexican jessamine. The interior of the theatre, the bare bench on which she was to sit, filled her with intolerable disgust; she upbraided me for bringing her there. Although she sat beside me, she wished to go, and she went. I had spent sleepless nights, and squandered two months of my life for her, and I could not please her. Never had that tormenting spirit been more unfeeling or more fascinating.

"I sat beside her in the cramped back seat of the vehicle; all the way I could feel her breath on me and the contact of her perfumed glove; I saw distinctly all her exceeding beauty; I inhaled a vague scent of orris-root; so wholly a woman she was, with no touch of womanhood. Just then a sudden gleam of light lit up the depths of this mysterious life for me. I thought all at once of a book just published by a poet, a genuine conception of the artist, in the shape of the statue of Polycletus.

"I seemed to see that monstrous creation, at one time an officer, breaking in a spirited horse; at another, a girl, who gives herself up to her toilette and breaks her lovers hearts; or again, a false lover driving a timid and gentle maid to despair. Unable to analyze Fœdora by any other process, I told her this fanciful story; but no hint of her resemblance to this poetry of the impossible crossed her—it simply diverted her; she was like a child over a story from the *Arabian Nights.*

"'Fœdora must be shielded by some talisman,' I thought to myself as I went back, 'or she could not resist the love of a man of my age, the infectious fever of that splendid malady of the soul. Is Fœdora, like Lady Delacour, a prey to a cancer? Her life is certainly an unnatural one.'

"I shuddered at the thought. Then I decided on a plan, at once the wildest and the most rational that lover ever

dreamed of. I would study this woman from a physical point of view, as I had already studied her intellectually, and to this end I made up my mind to spend a night in her room without her knowledge. This project preyed upon me as a thirst for revenge gnaws at the heart of a Corsican monk. This is how I carried it out. On the days when Fœdora received, her rooms were far too crowded for the hall-porter to keep the balance even between goers and comers; I could remain in the house, I felt sure, without causing a scandal in it, and I waited the countess' coming soirée with impatience. As I dressed I put a little English penknife into my waistcoat pocket, instead of a poniard. That literary implement, if found upon me, could awaken no suspicion, but I knew not whither my romantic resolution might lead, and I wished to be prepared.

"As soon as the rooms began to fill, I entered the bedroom and examined the arrangements. The inner and outer shutters were closed; this was a good beginning; and as the waiting-maid might come to draw back the curtains that hung over the windows, I pulled them together. I was running great risks in venturing to manœuvre beforehand in this way, but I had accepted the situation, and had deliberately reckoned with its dangers.

"About midnight I hid myself in the embrasure of the window. I tried to scramble on to a ledge of the wainscoting, hanging on by the fastening of the shutters with my back against the wall, in such a position that my feet could not be visible. When I had carefully considered my points of support, and the space between me and the curtains, I had become sufficiently acquainted with all the difficulties of my position to stay in it without fear of detection if undisturbed by cramp, coughs, or sneezings. To avoid useless fatigue, I remained standing until the critical moment, when I must hang suspended like a spider in its web. The white-watered silk and muslin of the curtains spread before me in great pleats like organ-pipes. With my penknife I cut loop-holes in them, through which I could see.

"I heard vague murmurs from the salons, the laughter and the louder tones of the speakers. The smothered commotion and vague uproar lessened by slow degrees. One man and another came for his hat from the countess' chest of drawers, close to where I stood. I shivered, if the curtains were disturbed, at the thought of the mischances consequent on the confused and hasty investigations made by the men in a hurry to depart, who were rummaging everywhere. When I experienced no misfortunes of this kind, I augured well of my enterprise. An old wooer of Fœdora's came for the last hat; he thought himself quite alone, looked at the bed, and heaved a great sigh, accompanied by some inaudible exclamation, into which he threw sufficient energy. In the boudoir close by, the countess, finding only some five or six intimate acquaintances about her, proposed tea. The scandals for which existing society has reserved the little faculty of belief that it retains, mingled with epigrams and trenchant witticisms, and the clatter of cups and spoons. Rastignac drew roars of laughter by merciless sarcasms at the expense of my rivals.

" 'M. de Rastignac is a man with whom it is better not to quarrel,' said the countess, laughing.

" 'I am quite of that opinion,' was his candid reply. 'I have always been right about my aversions—and my friendships as well,' he added. 'Perhaps my enemies are quite as useful to me as my friends. I have made a particular study of modern phraseology, and of the natural craft that is used in all attack or defence. Official eloquence is one of our perfect social products.

" 'One of your friends is not clever, so you speak of his integrity and his candor. Another's work is heavy; you introduce it as a piece of conscientious labor; and if the book is ill written, you extol the ideas it contains. Such an one is treacherous and fickle, slips through your fingers every moment; bah! he is attractive, bewitching, he is delightful! Suppose they are enemies, you fling every one, dead or alive, in their teeth. You reverse your phraseology for their bene-

fit, and you are as keen in detecting their faults as you were before adroit in bringing out the virtues of your friends. This way of using the mental lorgnette is the secret of conversation nowadays, and the whole art of the complete courtier. If you neglect it, you might as well go out as an unarmed knight-banneret to fight against men in armor. And I make use of it, and even abuse it at times. So we are respected—I, my friends, and, moreover, my sword is quite as sharp as my tongue.'

"One of Fœdora's most fervid worshipers, whose presumption was notorious, and who even made it contribute to his success, took up the glove thrown down so scornfully by Rastignac. He began an unmeasured eulogy of me, my performances, and my character. Rastignac had overlooked this method of detraction. His sarcastic encomiums misled the countess, who sacrificed without mercy; she betrayed my secrets, and derided my pretensions and my hopes, to divert her friends.

" 'There is a future before him,' said Rastignac. 'Some day he may be in a position to take a cruel revenge; his talents are at least equal to his courage; and I should consider those who attack him very rash, for he has a good memory——'

" 'And writes Memoirs,' put in the countess, who seemed to object to the deep silence that prevailed.

" 'Memoirs of a sham countess, madame,' replied Rastignac. 'Another sort of courage is needed to write that sort of thing.'

" 'I give him credit for plenty of courage,' she answered; 'he is faithful to me.'

"I was greatly tempted to show myself suddenly among the railers, like the shade of Banquo in Macbeth. I should have lost a mistress, but I had a friend! But love inspired me all at once, with one of those treacherous and fallacious subtleties that it can use to soothe all our pangs.

"If Fœdora loved me, I thought, she would be sure to disguise her feelings by some mocking jest. How often the heart protests against a lie on the lips!

"Well, very soon my audacious rival, left alone with the countess, rose to go.

"'What! already?' asked she in a coaxing voice that set my heart beating. 'Will you not give me a few more minutes? Have you nothing more to say to me? will you never sacrifice any of your pleasures for me?'

"He went away.

"'Ah!' she yawned; 'how very tiresome they all are!'

"She pulled a cord energetically till the sound of a bell rang through the place; then, humming a few notes of *Pria che spunti,* the countess entered her room. No one had ever heard her sing; her muteness had called forth the wildest explanations. She had promised her first lover, so it was said, who had been held captive by her talent, and whose jealousy over her stretched beyond his grave, that she would never allow others to experience a happiness that he wished to be his and his alone.

"I exerted every power of my soul to catch the sounds. Higher and higher rose the notes; Fœdora's life seemed to dilate within her; her throat poured forth all its richest tones; something well-nigh divine entered into the melody. There was a bright purity and clearness of tone in the countess' voice, a thrilling harmony which reached the heart and stirred its pulses. Musicians are seldom unemotional; a woman who could sing like that must know how to love indeed. Her beautiful voice made one more puzzle in a woman mysterious enough before. I beheld her then, as plainly as I see you at this moment. She seemed to listen to herself, to experience a secret rapture of her own; she felt, as it were, an ecstasy like that of love.

"She stood before the hearth during the execution of the principal theme of the *rondo;* and when she ceased her face changed. She looked tired; her features seemed to alter. She had laid the mask aside; her part as an actress was over. Yet the faded look that came over her beautiful face, a result either of this performance or of the evening's fatigues, had its charms, too.

" 'This is her real self,' I thought.

"She set her foot on a bronze bar of the fender as if to warm it, took off her gloves, and drew over her head the gold chain from which her bejeweled scent-bottle hung. It gave me a quite indescribable pleasure to watch the feline grace of every movement; the supple grace a cat displays as it adjusts its toilette in the sun. She looked at herself in the mirror and said aloud ill-humoredly—'I did not look well this evening, my complexion is going with alarming rapidity; perhaps I ought to keep earlier hours, and give up this life of dissipation. Does Justine mean to trifle with me?' She rang again; her maid hurried in. Where she had been I cannot tell; she came in by a secret staircase. I was anxious to make a study of her. I had lodged accusations, in my romantic imaginings, against this invisible waiting-woman, a tall, well-made brunette.

" 'Did madame ring?'

" 'Yes, twice,' answered Fœdora; 'are you really growing deaf nowadays?'

" 'I was preparing madame's milk of almonds.'

"Justine knelt down before her, unlaced her sandals and drew them off, while her mistress lay carelessly back on her cushioned armchair beside the fire, yawned, and scratched her head. Every movement was perfectly natural; there was nothing whatever to indicate the secret sufferings or emotions with which I had credited her.

" 'George must be in love!' she remarked. 'I shall dismiss him. He has drawn the curtains again to-night. What does he mean by it?'

"All the blood in my veins rushed to my heart at this observation, but no more was said about curtains.

" 'Life is very empty,' the countess went on. 'Ah! be careful not to scratch me as you did yesterday. Just look here, I still have the marks of your nails about me,' and she held out a little silken knee. She thrust her bare feet into velvet slippers bound with swan's-down, and unfastened her dress, while Justine prepared to comb her hair.

"'You ought to marry, madame, and have children.'

"'Children!' she cried; 'it wants no more than that to finish me at once; and a husband! What man is there to whom I could——? Was my hair well arranged to-night?'

"'Not particularly.'

"'You are a fool!'

"'That way of crimping your hair too much is the least becoming way possible for you. Large, smooth curls suit you a great deal better.'

"'Really?'

"'Yes, really, madame; that wavy style only looks nice in fair hair.'

"'Marriage? never, never! Marriage is a commercial arrangement, for which I was never made.'

"What a disheartening scene for a lover! Here was a lonely woman, without friends or kin, without the religion of love, without faith in any affection. Yet however slightly she might feel the need to pour out her heart, a craving that every human being feels, it could only be satisfied by gossiping with her maid, by trivial and indifferent talk. . . . I grieved for her.

"Justine unlaced her. I watched her carefully when she was at last unveiled. Her maidenly form, in its rose-tinged whiteness, was visible through her shift in the taper light, as dazzling as some silver statue behind its gauze covering. No, there was no defect that need shrink from the stolen glances of love. Alas, a fair form will overcome the stoutest resolutions!

"The maid lighted the taper in the alabaster sconce that hung before the bed, while her mistress sat thoughtful and silent before the fire. Justine went for a warming-pan, turned down the bed, and helped to lay her mistress in it; then, after some further time spent in punctiliously rendering various services that showed how seriously Fœdora respected herself, her maid left her. The countess turned to and fro several times, and sighed; she was ill at ease; faint, just perceptible sounds, like signs of impatience, escaped

from her lips. She reached out a hand to the table, and took a flask from it, from which she shook four or five drops of some brown liquid into some milk before taking it; again there followed some painful sighs, and the exclamation, *'Mon Dieu!'*

"The cry, and the tone in which it was uttered, wrung my heart. By degrees she lay motionless. This frightened me; but very soon I heard a sleeper's heavy, regular breathing. I drew the rustling silk curtains apart, left my post, went to the foot of the bed, and gazed at her with feelings that I cannot define. She was so enchanting as she lay like a child, with her arm above her head; but the sweetness of the fair, quiet visage, surrounded by the lace, only irritated me. I had not been prepared for the torture to which I was compelled to submit.

"'*Mon Dieu!*' that scrap of a thought which I understood not, but must even take as my sole light, had suddenly modified my opinion of Fœdora. Trite or profoundly significant, frivolous or of deep import, the words might be construed as expressive of either pleasure or pain, of physical or of mental suffering. Was it a prayer or a malediction, a forecast or a memory, a fear or a regret? A whole life lay in that utterance, a life of wealth or of penury; perhaps it contained a crime!

"The mystery that lurked beneath this fair semblance of womanhood grew afresh; there were so many ways of explaining Fœdora, that she became inexplicable. A sort of language seemed to flow from between her lips. I put thoughts and feelings into the accidents of her breathing, whether weak or regular, gentle or labored. I shared her dreams; I would fain have divined her secrets by reading them through her slumber. I hesitated among contradictory opinions and decisions without number. I could not deny my heart to the woman I saw before me, with the calm, pure beauty in her face. I resolved to make one more effort. If I told her the story of my life, my love, my sacrifices, might I not awaken pity in her or draw a tear from her who never wept?

"As I set all my hopes on this last experiment, the sounds in the streets showed that day was at hand. For a moment's space I pictured Fœdora waking to find herself in my arms. I could have stolen softly to her side and slipped them about her in a close embrace. Resolved to resist the cruel tyranny of this thought, I hurried into the salon, heedless of any sounds I might make; but, luckily, I came upon a secret door leading to a little staircase. As I had expected, the key was in the lock; I slammed the door, went boldly out into the court, and gained the street in three bounds, without looking round to see whether I was observed.

"A dramatist was to read a comedy at the countess' house in two days' time; I went thither, intending to outstay the others, so as to make a rather singular request to her; I meant to ask her to keep the following evening for me alone, and to deny herself to other comers; but when I found myself alone with her, my courage failed. Every tick of the clock alarmed me. It wanted only a quarter of an hour of midnight.

"'If I do not speak,' I thought to myself, 'I must smash my head against the corner of the mantelpiece.'

"I gave myself three minutes' grace; the three minutes went by, and I did not smash my head upon the marble; my heart grew heavy, like a sponge with water.

"'You are exceedingly amusing,' said she.

"'Ah, madame, if you could but understand me!' I answered.

"'What is the matter with you?' she asked. 'You are turning pale.'

"'I am hesitating to ask a favor of you.'

"Her gesture revived my courage. I asked her to make the appointment with me.

"'Willingly,' she answered; 'but why will you not speak to me now?'

"'To be candid with you, I ought to explain the full scope of your promise: I want to spend this evening by your side, as if we were brother and sister. Have no fear; I am

aware of your antipathies; you must have divined me sufficiently to feel sure that I should wish you to do nothing that could be displeasing to you; presumption, moreover, would not thus approach you. You have been a friend to me, you have shown me kindness and great indulgence; know, therefore, that to-morrow I must bid you farewell.—Do not take back your word,' I exclaimed, seeing her about to speak, and I went away.

"At eight o'clock one evening towards the end of May, Fœdora and I were alone together in her gothic boudoir. I feared no longer; I was secure of happiness. My mistress should be mine, or I would seek a refuge in death. I had condemned my faint-hearted love, and a man who acknowledges his weakness is strong indeed.

"The countess, in her blue cashmere gown, was reclining on a sofa, with her feet on a cushion. She wore an Oriental turban such as painters assign to early Hebrews; its strangeness added an indescribable coquettish grace to her attractions. A transitory charm seemed to have laid its spell on her face; it might have furnished the argument that at every instant we become new and unparalleled beings, without any resemblance to the *us* of the future or of the past. I had never yet seen her so radiant.

"'Do you know that you have piqued my curiosity?' she said, laughing.

"'I will not disappoint it,' I said quietly, as I seated myself near to her and took the hand that she surrendered to me. 'You have a very beautiful voice!'

"'You have never heard me sing!' she exclaimed, starting involuntarily with surprise.

"'I will prove that it is quite otherwise, whenever it is necessary. Is your delightful singing still to remain a mystery? Have no fear, I do not wish to penetrate it.'

"We spent about an hour in familiar talk. While I adopted the attitude and manner of a man to whom Fœdora must refuse nothing, I showed her all a lover's deference. Acting in this way, I received a favor—I was allowed to kiss

her hand. She daintily drew off the glove, and my whole soul was dissolved and poured forth in that kiss. I was steeped in the bliss of an illusion in which I tried to believe.

"Fœdora lent herself most unexpectedly to my caress and my flatteries. Do not accuse me of faint-heartedness; if I had gone a step beyond these fraternal compliments, the claws would have been out of the sheath and into me. We remained perfectly silent for nearly ten minutes. I was admiring her, investing her with the charms she had not. She was mine just then, and mine only,—this enchanting being was mine, as was permissible, in my imagination; my longing wrapped her round and held her close; in my soul I wedded her. The countess was subdued and fascinated by my magnetic influence. Ever since I have regretted that this subjugation was not absolute; but just then I yearned for her soul, her heart alone, and for nothing else. I longed for an ideal and perfect happiness, a fair illusion that cannot last for very long. At last I spoke, feeling that the last hours of my frenzy were at hand.

" 'Hear me, madame. I love you, and you know it; I have said so a hundred times; you must have understood me. I would not take upon me the airs of a coxcomb, nor would I flatter you, nor urge myself upon you like a fool; I would not owe your love to such arts as these! so I have been misunderstood. What sufferings have I not endured for your sake! For these, however, you were not to blame; but in a few minutes you shall decide for yourself. There are two kinds of poverty, madame. One kind openly walks the street in rags, an unconscious imitator of Diogenes, on a scanty diet, reducing life to its simplest terms; he is happier, maybe, than the rich; he has fewer cares at any rate, and accepts such portions of the world as stronger spirits refuse. Then there is poverty in splendor, a Spanish pauper, concealing the life of a beggar by his title, his bravery, and his pride; poverty that wears a white waistcoat and yellow kid gloves, a beggar with a carriage, whose whole career will be wrecked for lack of a halfpenny. Poverty of the first kind

belongs to the populace; the second kind is that of blacklegs, of kings, and of men of talent. I am neither a man of the people, nor a king, nor a swindler; possibly I have no talent either; I am an exception. With the name I bear I must die sooner than beg. Set your mind at rest, madame,' I said; 'to-day I have abundance, I possess sufficient of the clay for my needs;' for the hard look passed over her face which we wear whenever a well-dressed beggar takes us by surprise. 'Do you remember the day when you wished to go to the Gymnase without me, never believing that I should be there?' I went on.

"She nodded.

" 'I had laid out my last five-franc piece that I might see you there.—Do you recollect our walk in the Jardin des Plantes? The hire of your cab took everything I had.'

"I told her about my sacrifices, and described the life I led; heated not with wine, as I am to-day, but by the generous enthusiasm of my heart, my passion overflowed in burning words; I have forgotten how the feelings within me blazed forth; neither memory nor skill of mine could possibly reproduce it. It was no colorless chronicle of blighted affections; my love was strengthened by fair hopes; and such words came to me, by love's inspiration, that each had power to set forth a whole life—like echoes of the cries of a soul in torment. In such tones the last prayers ascend from dying men on the battlefield. I stopped, for she was weeping. *Grand Dieu!* I had reaped an actor's reward, the success of a counterfeit passion displayed at the cost of five francs paid at the theatre door. I had drawn tears from her.

" 'If I had known——' she said.

" 'Do not finish the sentence,' I broke in. 'Even now I love you well enough to murder you——'

"She reached for the bell-pull. I burst into a roar of laughter.

" 'Do not call any one,' I said. 'I shall leave you to finish your life in peace. It would be a blundering kind of hatred that would murder you! You need not fear violence of any

kind; I have spent a whole night at the foot of your bed without——'

"'Monsieur——' she said, blushing; but after that first impulse of modesty that even the most hardened women must surely own, she flung a scornful glance at me, and said:

"'You must have been very cold.'

"'Do you think that I set such value on your beauty, madame,' I answered, guessing the thoughts that moved her. 'Your beautiful face is for me a promise of a soul yet more beautiful. Madame, those to whom a woman is merely a woman can always purchase odalisques fit for the seraglio, and achieve their happiness at a small cost. But I aspired to something higher; I wanted the life of close communion of heart and heart with you that have no heart. I know that now. If you were to belong to another, I could kill him. And yet, no; for you would love him, and his death might hurt you perhaps. What agony this is!' I cried.

"'If it is any comfort to you,' she retorted cheerfully, 'I can assure you that I shall never belong to any one——"

"'So you offer an affront to God Himself,' I interrupted; 'and you will be punished for it. Some day you will lie upon your sofa suffering unheard-of ills, unable to endure the light or the slightest sound, condemned to live as it were in the tomb. Then, when you seek the causes of those lingering and avenging torments, you will remember the woes that you distributed so lavishly upon your way. You have sown curses, and hatred will be your reward. We are the real judges, the executioners of a justice that reigns here below, which overrules the justice of man and the laws of God.'

"'No doubt it is very culpable in me not to love you,' she said, laughing. 'Am I to blame? No. I do not love you; you are a man, that is sufficient. I am happy by myself; why should I give up my way of living, a selfish way, if you will, for the caprices of a master? Marriage is a sacrament by virtue of which each imparts nothing but vexations to the other. Children, moreover, worry me. Did I not faith-

fully warn you about my nature? Why are you not satisfied to have my friendship? I wish I could make you amends for all the troubles I have caused you, through not guessing the value of your poor five-franc pieces. I appreciate the extent of your sacrifices; but your devotion and delicate tact can be repaid by love alone, and I care so little for you, that this scene has a disagreeable effect upon me.'

"'I am fully aware of my absurdity,' I said, unable to restrain my tears. 'Pardon me,' I went on, 'it was a delight to hear those cruel words you have just uttered, so well I love you. O, if I could testify my love with every drop of blood in me!'

"'Men always repeat these classic formulas to us, more or less effectively,' she answered, still smiling. 'But it appears very difficult to die at our feet, for I see corpses of that kind about everywhere. It is twelve o'clock. Allow me to go to bed.'

"'And in two hours' time you will cry to yourself, *Ah, mon Dieu!*'

"'Like the day before yesterday! Yes,' she said, 'I was thinking of my stockbroker; I had forgotten to tell him to convert my five per cent stock into the threes, and the three per cents had fallen during the day.'

"I looked at her, and my eyes glittered with anger. Sometimes a crime may be a whole romance; I understood that just then. She was so accustomed, no doubt, to the most impassioned declarations of this kind, that my words and my tears were forgotten already.

"'Would you marry a peer of France?' I demanded abruptly.

"'If he were a duke, I might.'

"I seized my hat and made her a bow.

"'Permit me to accompany you to the door,' she said, cutting irony in her tones, in the poise of her head, and in her gesture.

"'Madame——"

"'Monsieur?'

"'I shall never see you again.'

"'I hope not,' and she insolently inclined her head.

"'You wish to be a duchess?' I cried, excited by a sort of madness that her insolence roused in me. 'You are wild for honors and titles? Well, only let me love you; bid my pen write and my voice speak for you alone; be the inmost soul of my life, my guiding star! Then, only accept me for your husband as a minister, a peer of France, a duke. I will make of myself whatever you would have me be!'

"'You made good use of the time you spent with the advocate,' she said, smiling. 'There is a fervency about your pleadings.'

"'The present is yours,' I cried, 'but the future is mine! I only lose a woman; you are losing a name and a family. Time is big with my revenge; time will spoil your beauty, and yours will be a solitary death; and glory waits for me!'

"'Thanks for your peroration!' she said, repressing a yawn; the wish that she might never see me again was expressed in her whole bearing.

"That remark silenced me. I flung at her a glance full of hatred, and hurried away.

"Fœdora must be forgotten; I must cure myself of my infatuation, and betake myself once more to my lonely studies, or die. So I set myself tremendous tasks; I determined to complete my labors. For fifteen days I never left my garret, spending whole nights in pallid thought. I worked with difficulty, and by fits and starts, despite my courage and the stimulation of despair. The muse had fled. I could not exorcise the brilliant mocking image of Fœdora. Something morbid brooded over every thought, a vague longing as dreadful as remorse. I imitated the anchorites of the Thebaid. If I did not pray as they did, I lived a life in the desert like theirs, hewing out my ideas as they were wont to hew their rocks. I could at need have girdled my waist with spikes, that physical suffering might quell mental anguish.

"One evening Pauline found her way into my room.

"'You are killing yourself,' she said, imploringly; 'you should go out and see your friends——'

"'Pauline, you were a true prophet; Fœdora is killing me, I want to die. My life is intolerable.'

"'Is there only one woman in the world?' she asked, smiling. 'Why make yourself so miserable in so short a life?'

"I looked at Pauline in bewilderment. She left me before I noticed her departure; the sound of her words had reached me, but not their sense. Very soon I had to take my Memoirs in manuscript to my literary-contractor. I was so absorbed by my passion, that I could not remember how I had managed to live without money; I only knew that the four hundred and fifty francs due to me would pay my debts. So I went to receive my salary, and met Rastignac, who thought me changed and thinner.

"'What hospital have you been discharged from?' he asked.

"'That woman is killing me,' I answered; 'I can neither despise her nor forget her.'

"'You had much better kill her, then perhaps you would think no more of her,' he said, laughing.

"'I have often thought of it,' I replied; 'but though sometimes the thought of a crime revives my spirits, of violence and murder, either or both, I am really incapable of carrying out the design. The countess is an admirable monster who would crave for pardon, and not every man is an Othello.'

"'She is like every woman who is beyond our reach,' Rastignac interrupted.

"'I am mad,' I cried; 'I can feel the madness raging at times in my brain. My ideas are like shadows; they flit before me, and I cannot grasp them. Death would be preferable to this life, and I have carefully considered the best way of putting an end to the struggle. I am not thinking of the living Fœdora in the Faubourg Saint Honoré, but of my Fœdora here,' and I tapped my forehead. 'What do you say to opium?'

"'Pshaw! horrid agonies,' said Rastignac.

"'Or charcoal fumes?'

"'A low dodge.'

"'Or the Seine?'

"'The drag-nets, and the Morgue too, are filthy.'

"'A pistol-shot?'

"'And if you miscalculate, you disfigure yourself for life. Listen to me,' he went on, 'like all young men, I have pondered over suicide. Which of us hasn't killed himself two or three times before he is thirty? I find there is no better course than to use existence as a means of pleasure. Go in for thorough dissipation, and your passion or you will perish in it. Intemperance, my dear fellow, commands all forms of death. Does she not wield the thunderbolt of apoplexy? Apoplexy is a pistol-shot that does not miscalculate. Orgies are lavish in all physical pleasures; is not that the small change for opium? And the riot that makes us drink to excess bears a challenge to mortal combat with wine. That butt of Malmsey of the Duke of Clarence's must have had a pleasanter flavor than Seine mud. When we sink gloriously under the table, is not that a periodical death by drowning on a small scale? If we are picked up by the police and stretched out on those chilly benches of theirs at the police-station, do we not enjoy all the pleasures of the Morgue. For though we are not blue and green, muddy and swollen corpses, on the other hand we have the consciousness of the climax.

"'Ah,' he went on, 'this protracted suicide has nothing in common with a bankrupt grocer's demise. Tradespeople have brought the river into disrepute; they fling themselves in to soften their creditors' hearts. In your place I should endeavor to die gracefully; and if you wish to invent a novel way of doing it, by struggling with life after this manner, I will be your second. I am disappointed and sick of everything. The Alsacienne, whom it was proposed that I should marry, had six toes on her left foot; I cannot possibly live with a woman who has six toes! It would get about to a certainty, and then I should be ridiculous. Her income was only eighteen thousand francs; her fortune diminished in quantity

as her toes increased. The devil take it; if we begin an outrageous sort of life, we may come on some bit of luck. perhaps!'

"Rastignac's eloquence carried me away. The attractions of the plan shone too temptingly, hopes were kindled, the poetical aspects of the matter appealed to a poet.

"'How about money?' I said.

"'Haven't you four hundred and fifty francs?'

"'Yes, but debts to my landlady and the tailor——'

"'You would pay your tailor? You will never be anything whatever, not so much as a minister.'

"'But what can one do with twenty louis?'

"'Go to the gaming-table.'

"I shuddered.

"'You are going to launch out into what I call systematic dissipation,' said he, noticing my scruples, 'and yet you are afraid of a green table-cloth.'

"'Listen to me,' I answered. 'I promised my father never to set foot in a gaming-house. Not only is that a sacred promise, but I still feel an unconquerable disgust whenever I pass a gambling-hell; take the money and go without me. While our fortune is at stake, I will set my own affairs straight, and then I will go to your lodgings and wait for you.'

"That was the way I went to perdition. A young man has only to come across a woman who will not love him, or a woman who loves him too well, and his whole life becomes a chaos. Prosperity swallows up our energy just as adversity obscures our virtues. Back once more in my Hôtel de Saint-Quentin, I gazed about me a long while in the garret where I had led my scholar's temperate life, a life which would perhaps have been a long and honorable one, and that I ought not to have quitted for the fevered existence which had urged me to the brink of a precipice. Pauline surprised me in this dejected attitude.

"'Why, what is the matter with you?' she asked.

"I rose and quietly counted out the money owing to her

mother, and added to it sufficient to pay for six months' rent in advance. She watched me in some alarm.

"'I am going to leave you, dear Pauline.'

"'I knew it!' she exclaimed.

"'Listen, my child. I have not given up the idea of coming back. Keep my room for me for six months. If I do not return by the fifteenth of November, you will come into possession of my things. This sealed packet of manuscript is the fair copy of my great work on "The Will,"' I went on, pointing to a package. 'Will you deposit it in the King's Library? And you may do as you wish with everything that is left here.'

"Her look weighed heavily on my heart; Pauline was an embodiment of conscience there before me.

"'I shall have no more lessons,' she said, pointing to the piano.

"I did not answer that.

"'Will you write to me?'

"'Good-bye, Pauline.'

"I gently drew her towards me, and set a kiss on that innocent fair brow of hers, like snow that has not yet touched the earth—a father's or a brother's kiss. She fled. I would not see Madame Gaudin, hung my key in its wonted place, and departed. I was almost at the end of the Rue de Cluny when I heard a woman's light footstep behind me.

"'I have embroidered this purse for you,' Pauline said; 'will you refuse even that?'

"By the light of the street lamp I thought I saw tears in Pauline's eyes, and I groaned. Moved perhaps by a common impulse, we parted in haste like people who fear the contagion of the plague.

"As I waited with dignified calmness for Rastignac's return, his room seemed a grotesque interpretation of the sort of life I was about to enter upon. The clock on the chimney-piece was surmounted by a Venus resting on her tortoise; a half-smoked cigar lay in her arms. Costly furniture of various kinds—love tokens, very likely—was scattered about.

Old shoes lay on a luxurious sofa. The comfortable arm-chair into which I had thrown myself bore as many scars as a veteran; the arms were gashed, the back was overlaid with a thick, stale deposit of pomade and hair-oil from the heads of all his visitors. Splendor and squalor were oddly mingled, on the walls, the bed, and everywhere. You might have thought of a Neapolitan palace and the groups of *lazzaroni* about it. It was the room of a gambler or a *mauvais sujet,* where the luxury exists merely for one individual, who leads the life of the senses and does not trouble himself over inconsistencies.

"There was a certain imaginative element about the picture it presented. Life was suddenly revealed there in its rags and spangles as the incomplete thing it really is, of course, but so vividly and picturesquely; it was like a den where a brigand has heaped up all the plunder in which he delights. Some pages were missing from a copy of Byron's poems: they had gone to light a fire of a few sticks for this young person, who played for stakes of a thousand francs, and had not a faggot; who kept a tilbury, and had not a whole shirt to his back. Any day a countess or an actress or a run of luck at écarté might set him up with an outfit worthy of a king. A candle had been stuck into the green bronze sheath of a vesta-holder; a woman's portrait lay yonder, torn out of its carved gold setting. How was it possible that a young man, whose nature craved excitement, could renounce a life so attractive by reason of its contradictions; a life that afforded all the delights of war in the midst of peace? I was growing drowsy when Rastignac kicked the door open and shouted:

" 'Victory! Now we can take our time about dying.'

"He held out his hat filled with gold to me, and put it down on the table; then we pranced round it like a pair of cannibals about to eat a victim; we stamped, and danced, and yelled, and sang; we gave each other blows fit to kill an elephant, at sight of all the pleasures of the world contained in that hat.

" 'Twenty-seven thousand francs,' said Rastignac, adding a

few bank-notes to the pile of gold. 'That would be enough for other folk to live upon; will it be sufficient for us to die on? Yes! we will breathe our last in a bath of gold—hurrah!' and we capered afresh.

"We divided the windfall. We began with double-napoleons, and came down to the smaller coins, one by one. 'This for you, this for me,' we kept on saying, distilling our joy drop by drop.

" 'We won't go to sleep,' cried Rastignac. 'Joseph! some punch!'

"He threw gold to his faithful attendant.

" 'There is your share,' he said; 'go and bury yourself if you can.'

"Next day I went to Lesage and chose my furniture, took the rooms that you know in the Rue Taitbout, and left the decoration to one of the best upholsterers. I bought horses. I plunged into a vortex of pleasures, at once hollow and real. I went in for play, gaining and losing enormous sums, but only at friends' houses and in ballrooms; never in gaming-houses, for which I still retained the holy horror of my early days. Without meaning it, I made some friends, either through quarrels or owing to the easy confidence established among those who are going to the bad together; nothing, possibly, makes us cling to one another so tightly as our evil propensities.

"I made several ventures in literature, which were flatteringly received. Great men who followed the profession of letters, having nothing to fear from me, belauded me, not so much on account of my merits as to cast a slur on those of their rivals.

"I became a 'free-liver,' to make use of the picturesque expression appropriated by the language of excess. I made it a point of honor not to be long about dying, and that my zeal and prowess should eclipse those displayed by all others in the jolliest company. I was always spruce and carefully dressed. I had some reputation for cleverness. There was no sign about me of that fearful way of living which makes

a man into a mere digesting apparatus, a funnel, a pampered beast.

"Very soon Debauch rose before me in all the majesty of its horror, and I grasped all that it meant. Those prudent, steady-going characters who are laying down wine in bottles for their heirs, can barely conceive, it is true, of so wide a theory of life, nor appreciate its normal condition; but when will you instill poetry into the provincial intellect? Opium and tea, with all their delights, are merely drugs to folk of that calibre.

"Is not the imperfect sybarite to be met with even in Paris itself, that intellectual metropolis? Unfit to endure the fatigues of pleasure, this sort of person, after a drinking bout, is very much like those worthy bourgeois who fall foul of music after hearing a new opera by Rossini. Does he not renounce these courses in the same frame of mind that leads an abstemious man to forswear Ruffec patés, because the first one, forsooth, gave him the indigestion?

"Debauch is as surely an art as poetry, and is not for craven spirits. To penetrate its mysteries and appreciate its charms, conscientious application is required; and as with every path of knowledge, the way is thorny and forbidding at the outset. The great pleasures of humanity are hedged about with formidable obstacles; not its single enjoyments, but enjoyment as a system, a system which establishes seldom experienced sensations and makes them habitual, which concentrates and multiplies them for us, creating a dramatic life within our life, and imperatively demanding a prompt and enormous expenditure of vitality. War, Power, Art, like Debauch, are all forms of demoralization, equally remote from the faculties of humanity, equally profound, and all are alike difficult of access. But when man has once stormed the heights of these grand mysteries, does he not walk in another world? Are not generals, ministers, and artists carried, more or less, towards destruction by the need of violent distractions in an existence so remote from ordinary life as theirs?

"War, after all, is the Excess of bloodshed, as the Excess

of self-interest produces Politics. Excesses of every sort are brothers. These social enormities possess the attraction of the abyss; they draw us towards themselves as St. Helena beckoned Napoleon; we are fascinated, our heads swim, we wish to sound their depths though we cannot account for the wish. Perhaps the thought of Infinity dwells in these precipices, perhaps they contain some colossal flattery for the soul of man; for is he not, then, wholly absorbed in himself?

"The wearied artist needs a complete contrast to his paradise of imaginings and of studious hours; he either craves, like God, the seventh day of rest, or with Satan, the pleasures of hell; so that his senses may have free play in opposition to the employment of his faculties. Byron could never have taken for his relaxation to the independent gentleman's delights of boston and gossip, for he was a poet, and so must needs pit Greece against Mahmoud.

"In war, is not man an angel of extirpation, a sort of executioner on a gigantic scale? Must not the spell be strong indeed that makes us undergo such horrid sufferings so hostile to our weak frames, sufferings that encircle every strong passion with a hedge of thorns? The tobacco smoker is seized with convulsions, and goes through a kind of agony consequent upon his excesses; but has he not borne a part in delightful festivals in realms unknown? Has Europe ever ceased from wars? She has never given herself time to wipe the stains from her feet that are steeped in blood to the ankle. Mankind at large is carried away by fits of intoxication, as nature has its accessions of love.

"For men in private life, for a vegetating Mirabeau dreaming of storms in a time of calm, Excess comprises all things; it perpetually embraces the whole sum of life; it is something better still—it is a duel with an antagonist of unknown power, a monster, terrible at first sight, that must be seized by the horns, a labor that cannot be imagined.

"Suppose that nature has endowed you with a feeble stomach or one of limited capacity; you acquire a mastery

over it and improve it; you learn to carry your liquor; you grow accustomed to being drunk; you pass whole nights without sleep; at last you acquire the constitution of a colonel of cuirassiers; and in this way you create yourself afresh, as if to fly in the face of Providence.

"A man transformed after this sort is like a neophyte who has at last become a veteran, has accustomed his mind to shot and shell and his legs to lengthy marches. When the monster's hold on him is still uncertain, and it is not yet known which will have the better of it, they roll over and over, alternately victor and vanquished, in a world where everything is wonderful, where every ache of the soul is laid to sleep, where only the shadows of ideas are revived.

"This furious struggle has already become a necessity for us. The prodigal has struck a bargain for all the enjoyments with which life teems abundantly, at the price of his own death, like the mythical persons in legends who sold themselves to the devil for the power of doing evil. For them, instead of flowing quietly on in its monotonous course in the depths of some counting-house or study, life is poured out in a boiling torrent.

"Excess is, in short, for the body what the mystic's ecstasy is for the soul. Intoxication steeps you in fantastic imaginings every whit as strange as those of ecstatics. You know hours as full of rapture as a young girl's dreams; you travel without fatigue; you chat pleasantly with your friends; words come to you with a whole life in each, and fresh pleasures without regrets; poems are set forth for you in a few brief phrases. The coarse animal satisfaction, in which science has tried to find a soul, is followed by the enchanted drowsiness that men sigh for under the burden of consciousness. Is it not because they all feel the need of absolute repose? Because Excess is a sort of toll that genius pays to pain?

"Look at all great men; nature made them pleasure-loving or base, every one. Some mocking or jealous power corrupted them in either soul or body, so as to make all their powers futile, and their efforts of no avail.

"All men and all things appear before you in the guise you choose, in those hours when wine has sway. You are lord of all creation; you transform it at your pleasure. And throughout this unceasing delirium, Play may pour, at your will, its molten lead into your veins.

"Some day you will fall into the monster's power. Then you will have, as I had, a frenzied awakening, with impotence sitting by your pillow. Are you an old soldier? Phthisis attacks you. A diplomatist? An aneurism hangs death in your heart by a thread. It will perhaps be consumption that will cry to me, 'Let us be going!' as to Raphael of Urbino, in old time, killed by an excess of love.

"In this way I have existed. I was launched into the world too early or too late. My energy would have been dangerous there, no doubt, if I had not squandered it in such ways as these. Was not the world rid of an Alexander, by the cup of Hercules, at the close of a drinking bout?

"There are some, the sport of Destiny, who must either have heaven or hell, the hospice of St. Bernard or riotous excess. Only just now I lacked the heart to moralize about those two," and he pointed to Euphrasia and Aquilina. "They are types of my own personal history, images of my life! I could scarcely reproach them; they stood before me like judges.

"In the midst of this drama that I was enacting, and while my distracting disorder was at its height, two crises supervened; each brought me keen and abundant pangs. The first came a few days after I had flung myself, like Sardanapalus, on my pyre. I met Fœdora under the peristyle of the Bouffons. We both were waiting for our carriages.

" 'Ah! so you are living yet?'

"That was the meaning of her smile, and probably of the spiteful words she murmured in the ear of her *cicisbeo,* telling him my history no doubt, rating mine as a common love affair. She was deceived, yet she was applauding her perspicacity. Oh, that I should be dying for her, must still adore her, always see her through my potations, see her still when I was

overcome with wine, or in the arms of courtesans; and know that I was a target for her scornful jests! Oh, that I should be unable to tear the love of her out of my breast and to fling it at her feet!

"Well, I quickly exhausted my funds, but owing to those three years of discipline, I enjoyed the most robust health, and on the day that I found myself without a penny I felt remarkably well. In order to carry on the process of dying, I signed bills at short dates, and the day came when they must be met. Painful excitements! but how they quicken the pulses of youth! I was not prematurely aged; I was young yet, and full of vigor and life.

"At my first debt all my virtues came to life; slowly and despairingly they seemed to pace towards me; but I could compound with them—they were like aged aunts that begin with a scolding and end by bestowing tears and money upon you.

"Imagination was less yielding; I saw my name bandied about through every city in Europe. 'One's name is oneself,' says Eusèbe Salverte. After these excursions I returned to the room I had never quitted, like a doppelganger in a German tale, and came to myself with a start.

"I used to see with indifference a banker's messenger going on his errands through the streets of Paris, like a commercial Nemesis, wearing his master's livery—a gray coat and a silver badge; but now I hated the species in advance. One of them came one morning to ask me to meet some eleven bills that I had scrawled my name upon. My signature was worth three thousand francs! Taking me altogether, I myself was not worth that amount. Sheriff's deputies rose up before me, turning their callous faces upon my despair, as the hangman regards the criminal to whom he says, 'It has just struck half-past three.' I was in the power of their clerks; they could scribble my name, drag it through the mire, and jeer at it. I was a defaulter. Has a debtor any right to himself? Could not other men call me to account for my way of living? Why had I eaten puddings *à la*

chipolata? Why had I iced my wine? Why had I slept, or walked, or thought, or amused myself when I had not paid them?

"At any moment, in the middle of a poem, during some train of thought, or while I was gaily breakfasting in the pleasant company of my friends, I might look to see a gentleman enter in a coat of chestnut-brown, with a shabby hat in his hand. This gentleman's appearance would signify my debt, the bill I had drawn; the spectre would compel me to leave the table to speak to him, blight my spirits, despoil me of my cheerfulness, of my mistress, of all I possessed, down to my very bedstead.

"Remorse itself is more easily endured. Remorse does not drive us into the street nor into the prison of Sainte-Pélagie; it does not force us into the detestable sink of vice. Remorse only brings us to the scaffold, where the executioner invests us with a certain dignity; as we pay the extreme penalty, everybody believes in our innocence; but people will not credit a penniless prodigal with a single virtue.

"My debts had other incarnations. There is the kind that goes about on two feet, in a green cloth coat, and blue spectacles, carrying umbrellas of various hues; you come face to face with him at the corner of some street, in the midst of your mirth. These have the detestable prerogative of saying, 'M. de Valentin owes me something, and does not pay. I have a hold on him. He had better not show me any offensive airs!' You must bow to your creditors, and moreover bow politely. 'When are you going to pay me?' say they. And you must lie, and beg money of another man, and cringe to a fool seated on his strong-box, and receive sour looks in return from these horse-leeches; a blow would be less hateful; you must put up with their crass ignorance and calculating morality. A debt is a feat of the imaginative that they cannot appreciate. A borrower is often carried away and overmastered by generous impulses; nothing great, nothing magnanimous can move or dominate those who live for money,

and recognize nothing but money. I myself held money in abhorrence.

"Or a bill may undergo a final transformation into some meritorious old man with a family dependent upon him. My creditor might be a living picture for Greuze, a paralytic with his children round him, a soldier's widow, holding out beseeching hands to me. Terrible creditors are these with whom we are forced to sympathize, and when their claims are satisfied we owe them a further debt of assistance.

"The night before the bills fell due, I lay down with the false calm of those who sleep before their approaching execution, or with a duel in prospect, rocked as they are by delusive hopes. But when I woke, when I was cool and collected, when I found myself imprisoned in a banker's portfolio, and floundering in statements covered with red ink—then my debts sprang up everywhere, like grasshoppers, before my eyes. There were my debts, my clock, my armchairs; my debts were inlaid in the very furniture which I liked best to use. These gentle inanimate slaves were to fall a prey to the harpies of the Châtelet, were to be carried off by the broker's men, and brutally thrown on the market. Ah, my property was a part of myself!

"The sound of the door-bell rang through my heart; while it seemed to strike at me, where kings should be struck at —in the head. Mine was a martyrdom, without heaven for its reward. For a magnanimous nature, debt is a hell, and a hell, moreover, with sheriff's officers and brokers in it. An undischarged debt is something mean and sordid; it is a beginning of knavery; it is something worse, it is a lie; it prepares the way for crime, and brings together the planks for the scaffold. My bills were protested. Three days afterwards I met them, and this is how it happened.

"A speculator came, offering to buy the island in the Loire belonging to me, where my mother lay buried. I closed with him. When I went to his solicitor to sign the deeds, I felt a cavern-like chill in the dark office that made me shudder; it was the same cold dampness that had laid hold

upon me at the brink of my father's grave. I looked upon this as an evil omen. I seemed to see the shade of my mother, and to hear her voice. What power was it that made my own name ring vaguely in my ears, in spite of the clamor of bells?

"The money paid down for my island, when all my debts were discharged, left me in possession of two thousand francs. I could now have returned to a scholar's tranquil life, it is true; I could have gone back to my garret after having gained an experience of life, with my head filled with the results of extensive observation, and with a certain sort of reputation attaching to me. But Fœdora's hold upon her victim was not relaxed. We often met. I compelled her admirers to sound my name in her ears, by dint of astonishing them with my cleverness and success, with my horses and equipages. It all found her impassive and uninterested; so did an ugly phrase of Rastignac's, 'He is killing himself for you.'

"I charged the world at large with my revenge, but I was not happy. While I was fathoming the miry depths of life, I only recognized the more keenly at all times the happiness of reciprocal affection; it was a shadow that I followed through all that befell me in my extravagance, and in my wildest moments. It was my misfortune to be deceived in my fairest beliefs, to be punished by ingratitude for benefiting others, and to receive uncounted pleasures as the reward of my errors—a sinister doctrine, but a true one for the prodigal!

"The contagious leprosy of Fœdora's vanity had taken hold of me at last. I probed my soul, and found it cankered and rotten. I bore the marks of the devil's claw upon my forehead. It was impossible to me thenceforward to do without the incessant agitation of a life fraught with danger at every moment, or to dispense with the execrable refinements of luxury. If I had possessed millions, I should still have gambled, reveled, and racketed about. I wished never to be alone with myself, and I must have false friends and courtesans, wine and good cheer to distract me. The ties that

attach a man to family life had been permanently broken for me. I had become a galley-slave of pleasure, and must accomplish my destiny of suicide. During the last days of my prosperity, I spent every night in the most incredible excesses; but every morning death cast me back upon life again. I would have taken a conflagration with as little concern as any man with a life annuity. However, I at last found myself alone with a twenty-franc piece; I bethought me then of Rastignac's luck——

"Eh, eh!——" Raphael exclaimed, interrupting himself, as he remembered the talisman and drew it from his pocket. Perhaps he was wearied by the long day's strain, and had no more strength left wherewith to pilot his head through the seas of wine and punch; or perhaps, exasperated by this symbol of his own existence, the torrent of his own eloquence gradually overwhelmed him. Raphael became excited and elated and like one completely deprived of reason.

"The devil take death!" he shouted, brandishing the skin; "I mean to live! I am rich, I have every virtue; nothing will withstand me. Who would not be generous, when everything is in his power? Aha! Aha! I wished for two hundred thousand livres a year, and I shall have them. Bow down before me, all of you, wallowing on the carpets like swine in the mire! You all belong to me—a precious property truly! I am rich; I could buy you all, even the deputy snoring over there. Scum of society, give me your benediction! I am the Pope."

Raphael's vociferations had been hitherto drowned by a thorough-bass of snores, but now they became suddenly audible. Most of the sleepers started up with a cry, saw the cause of the disturbance on his feet, tottering uncertainly, and cursed him in concert for a drunken brawler.

"Silence!" shouted Raphael. "Back to your kennels, you dogs! Émile, I have riches, I will give you Havana cigars!"

"I am listening," the poet replied. "Death or Fœdora! On with you! That silky Fœdora deceived you. Women are

all daughters of Eve. There is nothing dramatic about that rigmarole of yours."

"Ah, but you were sleeping, slyboots."

"No—'Death or Fœdora!'—I have it!"

"Wake up!" Raphael shouted, beating Émile with the piece of shagreen as if he meant to draw electric fluid out of it.

"*Tonnerre!*" said Émile, springing up and flinging his arms round Raphael; "my friend, remember the sort of women you are with."

"I am a millionaire!"

"If you are not a millionaire, you are most certainly drunk."

"Drunk with power. I can kill you!—Silence! I am Nero! I am Nebuchadnezzar!"

"But, Raphael, we are in queer company, and you ought to keep quiet for the sake of your own dignity."

"My life has been silent too long. I mean to have my revenge now on the world at large. I will not amuse myself by squandering paltry five-franc pieces; I will reproduce and sum up my epoch by absorbing human lives, human minds, and human souls. There are the treasures of pestilence—that is no paltry kind of wealth, is it? I will wrestle with fevers—yellow, blue, or green—with whole armies, with gibbets. I can possess Fœdora—Yet no, I do not want Fœdora; she is a disease; I am dying of Fœdora. I want to forget Fœdora."

"If you keep on calling out like this, I shall take you into the dining-room."

"Do you see this skin? It is Solomon's will. Solomon belongs to me—a little varlet of a king! Arabia is mine, Arabia Petræa to boot; and the universe, and you too, if I choose. If I choose—Ah! be careful. I can buy up all your journalist's shop; you shall be my valet. You shall be my valet, you shall manage my newspaper. Valet! *valet,* that is to say, free from aches and pains, because he has no brains."

At the word, Émile carried Raphael off into the dining-room.

"All right," he remarked; "yes, my friend, I am your valet. But you are about to be editor-in-chief of a newspaper; so be quiet, and behave properly, for my sake. Have you no regard for me?"

"Regard for you! You shall have Havana cigars, with this bit of shagreen: always with this skin, this supreme bit of shagreen. It is a cure for corns, an efficacious remedy. Do you suffer? I will remove them."

"Never have I known you so senseless——"

"Senseless, my friend? Not at all. This skin contracts whenever I form a wish—'tis a paradox. There is a Brahmin underneath it! The Brahmin must be a droll fellow, for our desires, look you, are bound to expand——"

"Yes, yes——"

"I tell you——"

"Yes, yes, very true, I am quite of your opinion—our desires expand——"

"The skin, I tell you."

"Yes."

"You don't believe me. I know you, my friend; you are as full of lies as a new-made king."

"How can you expect me to follow your drunken maunderings?"

"I will bet you I can prove it. Let us measure it——"

"Goodness! he will never get off to sleep," exclaimed Émile, as he watched Raphael rummaging busily in the dining-room.

Thanks to the peculiar clearness with which external objects are sometimes projected on an inebriated brain, in sharp contrast to its own obscure imaginings, Valentin found an inkstand and a table-napkin, with the quickness of a monkey, repeating all the time:

"Let us measure it! Let us measure it!"

"All right," said Émile; "let us measure it!"

The two friends spread out the table-napkin and laid the

Magic Skin upon it. As Émile's hand appeared to be steadier than Raphael's, he drew a line with pen and ink round the talisman, while his friend said:

"I wished for an income of two hundred thousand livres, didn't I? Well, when that comes, you will observe a mighty diminution of my chagrin."

"Yes—now go to sleep. Shall I make you comfortable on that sofa? Now then, are you all right?"

"Yes, my nursling of the press. You shall amuse me; you shall drive the flies away from me. The friend of adversity should be the friend of prosperity. So I will give you some Hava—na—cig——"

"Come, now, sleep. Sleep off your gold, you millionaire!"

"You! sleep off your paragraphs! Good-night! Say good-night to Nebuchadnezzar!—Love! Wine! France!—glory and tr—treas——"

Very soon the snorings of the two friends were added to the music with which the rooms resounded—an ineffectual concert! The lights went out one by one, their crystal sconces cracking in the final flare. Night threw dark shadows over this prolonged revelry, in which Raphael's narrative had been a second orgy of speech, of words without ideas, of ideas for which words had often been lacking.

Towards noon, next day, the fair Aquilina bestirred herself. She yawned wearily. She had slept with her head upon a painted velvet footstool, and her cheeks were mottled over by contact with the surface. Her movement awoke Euphrasia, who suddenly sprang up with a hoarse cry; her pretty face, that had been so fresh and fair in the evening, was sallow now and pallid; she looked like a candidate for the hospital. The rest awoke also by degrees, with portentous groanings, to feel themselves over in every stiffened limb, and to experience the infinite varieties of weariness that weighed upon them.

A servant came in to throw back the shutters and open the windows. There they all stood, brought back to conscious-

ness by the warm rays of sunlight that shone upon the sleepers' heads. Their movements during slumber had disordered the elaborately arranged hair and toilettes of the women. They presented a ghastly spectacle in the bright daylight. Their hair fell ungracefully about them; their eyes, lately so brilliant, were heavy and dim; the expression of their faces was entirely changed. The sickly hues, which daylight brings out so strongly, were frightful. An olive tint had crept over the lymphatic faces, so fair and soft when in repose; the dainty red lips were grown pale and dry, and bore tokens of the degradation of excess. Each disowned his mistress of the night before; the women looked wan and discolored, like flowers trampled under foot by a passing procession.

The men who scorned them looked even more horrible. Those human faces would have made you shudder. The hollow eyes with the dark circles round them seemed to see nothing; they were dull with wine and stupefied with heavy slumbers that had been exhausting rather than refreshing. There was an indescribable ferocious and stolid bestiality about these haggard faces, where bare physical appetite appeared shorn of all the poetical illusion with which the intellect invests it. Even these fearless champions, accustomed to measure themselves with excess, were struck with horror at this awakening of vice, stripped of its disguises, at being confronted thus with sin, the skeleton in rags, lifeless and hollow, bereft of the sophistries of the intellect and the enchantments of luxury. Artists and courtesans scrutinized in silence and with haggard glances the surrounding disorder, the rooms where everything had been laid waste, at the havoc wrought by heated passions.

Demoniac laughter broke out when Taillefer, catching the smothered murmurs of his guests, tried to greet them with a grin. His darkly flushed, perspiring countenance loomed upon this pandemonium, like the image of a crime that knows no remorse (see "L'Auberge rouge"). The picture was complete. A picture of a foul life in the midst of luxury,

a hideous mixture of the pomp and squalor of humanity; an awakening after the frenzy of Debauch has crushed and squeezed all the fruits of life in her strong hands, till nothing but unsightly refuse is left to her, and lies in which she believes no longer. You might have thought of Death gloating over a family stricken with the plague.

The sweet scents and dazzling lights, the mirth and the excitement were all no more; disgust with its nauseous sensations and searching philosophy was there instead. The sun shone in like truth, the pure outer air was like virtue; in contrast with the heated atmosphere, heavy with the fumes of the previous night of revelry.

Accustomed as they were to their life, many of the girls thought of other days and other wakings; pure and innocent days when they looked out and saw the roses and honeysuckle about the casement, and the fresh countryside without enraptured by the glad music of the skylark; while earth lay in mists, lighted by the dawn, and in all the glittering radiance of dew. Others imagined the family breakfast, the father and children round the table, the innocent laughter, the unspeakable charm that pervaded it all, the simple hearts and their meal as simple.

An artist mused upon his quiet studio, on his statue in its severe beauty, and the graceful model who was waiting for him. A young man recollected a lawsuit on which the fortunes of a family hung, and an important transaction that needed his presence. The scholar regretted his study and that noble work that called for him. Nearly everybody was sorry for himself. Émile appeared just then as smiling, blooming, and fresh as the smartest assistant in a fashionable shop.

"You are all as ugly as bailiffs. You won't be fit for anything to-day, so this day is lost, and I vote for breakfast."

At this Taillefer went out to give some orders. The women went languidly up to the mirrors to set their toilettes in order. Each one shook herself. The wilder sort lectured the steadier ones. The courtesans made fun of those who

looked unable to continue the boisterous festivity; but these wan forms revived all at once, stood in groups, and talked and smiled. Some servants quickly and adroitly set the furniture and everything else in its place, and a magnificent breakfast was got ready.

The guests hurried into the dining-room. Everything there bore indelible marks of yesterday's excess, it is true, but there were at any rate some traces of ordinary, rational existence, such traces as may be found in a sick man's dying struggles. And so the revelry was laid away and buried, like carnival of a Shrove Tuesday, by masks wearied out with dancing, drunk with drunkenness, and quite ready to be persuaded of the pleasures of lassitude, lest they should be forced to admit their own exhaustion.

As soon as these bold spirits surrounded the capitalist's breakfast-table, Cardot appeared. He had left the rest to make a night of it after the dinner, and finished the evening after his own fashion in the retirement of domestic life. Just now a sweet smile wandered over his features. He seemed to have a presentiment that there would be some inheritance to sample and divide, involving inventories and engrossing; an inheritance rich in fees and deeds to draw up, and something as juicy as the trembling fillet of beef in which their host had just plunged his knife.

"Oh, ho! we are to have breakfast in the presence of a notary," cried Cursy.

"You have come here just at the right time," said the banker, indicating the breakfast; "you can jot down the numbers, and initial off all the dishes."

"There is no will to make here, but contracts of marriage there may be, perhaps," said the scholar, who had made a satisfactory arrangement for the first time in twelve months.

"Oh! Oh!"

"Ah! Ah!"

"One moment," cried Cardot, fairly deafened by a chorus of wretched jokes. "I came here on serious business. I

am bringing six millions for one of you." (Dead silence.) "Monsieur," he went on, turning to Raphael, who at the moment was unceremoniously wiping his eyes on a corner of the table-napkin, "was not your mother a Mlle. O'Flaharty?"

"Yes," said Raphael mechanically enough; "Barbara Marie."

"Have you your certificate of birth about you," Cardot went on, "and Mme. de Valentin's as well?"

"I believe so."

"Very well then, monsieur; you are the sole heir of Major O'Flaharty, who died in August 1828 at Calcutta."

"An *incalcuttable* fortune," said the critic.

"The Major having bequeathed several amounts to public institutions in his will, the French Government sent in a claim for the remainder to the East India Company," the notary continued. "The estate is clear and ready to be transferred at this moment. I have been looking in vain for the heirs and assigns of Mlle. Barbara Marie O'Flaharty for a fortnight past, when yesterday at dinner——"

Just then Raphael suddenly staggered to his feet; he looked like a man who has just received a blow. Acclamation took the form of silence, for stifled envy had been the first feeling in every breast, and all eyes devoured him like flames. Then a murmur rose, and grew like the voice of a discontented audience, or the first mutterings of a riot, as everybody made some comment on this news of great wealth brought by the notary.

This abrupt subservience of fate brought Raphael thoroughly to his senses. He immediately spread out the table-napkin with which he had lately taken the measure of the piece of shagreen. He heeded nothing as he laid the talisman upon it, and shuddered involuntarily at the sight of a slight difference between the present size of the skin and the outline traced upon the linen.

"Why, what is the matter with him?" Taillefer cried. "He comes by his fortune very cheaply."

Soutiens-le Châtillon!" said Bixiou to Émile. "The joy will kill him."

A ghastly white hue overspread every line of the wan features of the heir-at-law. His face was drawn, every outline grew haggard; the hollows in his livid countenance grew deeper, and his eyes were fixed and staring. He was facing Death.

The opulent banker, surrounded by faded women, and faces with satiety written on them, the enjoyment that had reached the pitch of agony, was a living illustration of his own life.

Raphael looked thrice at the talisman, which lay passively within the merciless outlines on the table-napkin; he tried not to believe it, but his incredulity vanished utterly before the light of an inner presentiment. The whole world was his; he could have all things, but the will to possess them was utterly extinct. Like a traveler in the midst of the desert, with but a little water left to quench his thirst, he must measure his life by the draughts he took of it. He saw what every desire of his must cost him in the days of his life. He believed in the powers of the Magic Skin at last; he listened to every breath he drew; he felt ill already; he asked himself,

"Am I not consumptive? Did not my mother die of a lung complaint?"

"Aha, Raphael! what fun you will have! What will you give me?" asked Aquilina.

"Here's to the death of his uncle, Major O'Flaharty! There is a man for you."

"He will be a peer of France."

"Pooh! what is a peer of France since July?" said the amateur critic.

"Are you going to take a box at the Bouffons?"

"You are going to treat us all, I hope?" put in Bixiou.

"A man of his sort will be sure to do things in style," said Émile.

The hurrah set up by the jovial assembly rang in Valentin's ears, but he could not grasp the sense of a single word. Vague thoughts crossed him of the Breton peasant's life of

mechanical labor, without a wish of any kind; he pictured him burdened with a family, tilling the soil, living on buckwheat meal, drinking cider out of a pitcher, believing in the Virgin and the King, taking the sacrament at Easter, dancing of a Sunday on the green sward, and understanding never a word of the rector's sermon. The actual scene that lay before him, the gilded furniture, the courtesans, the feast itself, and the surrounding splendors, seemed to catch him by the throat, and made him cough.

"Do you wish for some asparagus?" the banker cried

"I wish for nothing!" thundered Raphael.

"Bravo!" Taillefer exclaimed; "you understand your position; a fortune confers the privilege of being impertinent. You are one of us. Gentlemen, let us drink to the might of gold! M. Valentin here, six times a millionaire, has become a power. He is a king, like all the rich; everything is at his disposal, everything lies under his feet. From this time forth the axiom that 'all Frenchmen are alike in the eyes of the law,' is for him a fib at the head of the Constitutional Charter. He is not going to obey the law—the law is going to obey him. There are neither scaffolds nor executioners for millionaires."

"Yes, there are," said Raphael; "they are their own executioners."

"Here is another victim of prejudices!" cried the banker.

"Let us drink!" Raphael said, putting the talisman into his pocket.

"What are you doing?" said Émile, checking his movement. "Gentlemen," he added, addressing the company, who were rather taken aback by Raphael's behavior, "you must know that our friend Valentin here—what am I saying?—I mean my Lord Marquis de Valentin—is in the possession of a secret for obtaining wealth. His wishes are fulfilled as soon as he knows them. He will make us all rich together, or he is a flunkey, and devoid of all decent feeling."

"Oh, Raphael dear, I should like a set of pearl ornaments!" Euphrasia exclaimed.

"If he has any gratitude in him, he will give me a couple of carriages with fast steppers," said Aquilina.

"Wish for a hundred thousand a year for me!"

"Indian shawls!"

"Pay my debts!"

"Send an apoplexy to my uncle, the old stick!"

"Ten thousand a year in the funds, and I'll cry quits with you, Raphael!"

"Deeds of gift and no mistake," was the notary's comment.

"He ought, at least, to rid me of the gout!"

"Lower the funds!" shouted the banker.

These phrases flew about like the last discharge of rockets at the end of a display of fireworks; and were uttered, perhaps, more in earnest than in jest.

"My good friend," Émile said solemnly, "I shall be quite satisfied with an income of two hundred thousand livres. Please to set about it at once."

"Do you not know the cost, Émile?" asked Raphael.

"A nice excuse!" the poet cried; "ought we not to sacrifice ourselves for our friends?"

"I have almost a mind to wish that you all were dead," Valentin made answer, with a dark, inscrutable look at his boon companions.

"Dying people are frightfully cruel," said Émile, laughing. "You are rich now," he went on gravely; "very well, I will give you two months at most before you grow vilely selfish. You are so dense already that you cannot understand a joke. You have only to go a little further to believe in your Magic Skin."

Raphael kept silent, fearing the banter of the company; but he drank immoderately, trying to drown in intoxication the recollection of his fatal power.

III

THE AGONY

In the early days of December an old man of some seventy years of age pursued his way along the Rue de Varenne, in spite of the falling rain. He peered up at the door of each house, trying to discover the address of the Marquis Raphael de Valentin, in a simple, childlike fashion, and with the abstracted look peculiar to philosophers. His face plainly showed traces of a struggle between a heavy mortification and an authoritative nature; his long, gray hair hung in disorder about a face like a piece of parchment shriveling in the fire. If a painter had come upon this curious character, he would, no doubt, have transferred him to his sketch-book on his return, a thin, bony figure, clad in black, and have inscribed beneath it: "Classical poet in search of a rhyme." When he had identified the number that had been given to him, this reincarnation of Rollin knocked meekly at the door of a splendid mansion.

"Is Monsieur Raphael in?" the worthy man inquired of the Swiss in livery.

"My Lord the Marquis sees nobody," said the servant, swallowing a huge morsel that he had just dipped in a large bowl of coffee.

"There is his carriage," said the elderly stranger, pointing to a fine equipage that stood under the wooden canopy that sheltered the steps before the house, in place of a striped linen awning. "He is going out; I will wait for him."

"Then you might wait here till to-morrow morning, old boy," said the Swiss. "A carriage is always waiting for monsieur. Please to go away. If I were to let any stranger come into the house without orders, I should lose an income of six hundred francs."

A tall old man, in a costume not unlike that of a subordinate in the Civil Service, came out of the vestibule and

hurried part of the way down the steps, while he made a survey of the astonished elderly applicant for admission.

"What is more, here is M. Jonathan," the Swiss remarked; "speak to him."

Fellow-feeling of some kind, or curiosity, brought the two old men together in a central space in the great entrance-court. A few blades of grass were growing in the crevices of the pavement; a terrible silence reigned in that great house. The sight of Jonathan's face would have made you long to understand the mystery that brooded over it, and that was announced by the smallest trifles about the melancholy place.

When Raphael inherited his uncle's vast estate, his first care had been to seek out the old and devoted servitor of whose affection he knew that he was secure. Jonathan had wept tears of joy at the sight of his young master, of whom he thought he had taken a final farewell; and when the marquis exalted him to the high office of steward, his happiness could not be surpassed. So old Jonathan became an intermediary power between Raphael and the world at large. He was the absolute disposer of his master's fortune, the blind instrument of an unknown will, and a sixth sense, as it were, by which the emotions of life were communicated to Raphael.

"I should like to speak with M. Raphael, sir," said the elderly person to Jonathan, as he climbed up the steps some way, into a shelter from the rain.

"To speak with my Lord the Marquis?" the steward cried. "He scarcely speaks even to me, his foster-father!"

"But I am likewise his foster-father," said the old man. "If your wife was his foster-mother, I fed him myself with the milk of the Muses. He is my nursling, my child, *carus alumnus!* I formed his mind, cultivated his understanding, developed his genius, and, I venture to say it, to my own honor and glory. Is he not one of the most remarkable men of our epoch? He was one of my pupils in two lower forms, and in rhetoric. I am his professor."

"Ah, sir, then you are M. Porriquet?"

"Exactly, sir, but——".

"Hush! hush!" Jonathan called to two underlings, whose voices broke the monastic silence that shrouded the house.

"But is the Marquis ill, sir?" the professor continued.

"My dear sir," Jonathan replied, "Heaven only knows what is the matter with my master. You see, there are not a couple of houses like ours anywhere in Paris. Do you understand? Not two houses. Faith, that there are not. My Lord the Marquis had this hôtel purchased for him; it formerly belonged to a duke and a peer of France; then he spent three hundred thousand francs over furnishing it. That's a good deal, you know, three hundred thousand francs! But every room in the house is a perfect wonder. 'Good,' said I to myself when I saw this magnificence; 'it is just like it used to be in the time of my lord, his late grandfather; and the young marquis is going to entertain all Paris and the Court!' Nothing of the kind! My lord refused to see any one whatever. 'Tis a funny life that he leads, M. Porriquet, you understand. An *inconciliable* life. He rises every day at the same time. I am the only person, you see, that may enter his room. I open the shutters at seven o'clock, summer or winter. It is all arranged very oddly. As I come in I say to him:

" 'You must get up and dress, my Lord Marquis.'

"Then he rises and dresses himself. I have to give him his dressing-gown, and it is always after the same pattern, and of the same material. I am obliged to replace it when it can be used no longer, simply to save him the trouble of asking for a new one. A queer fancy! As a matter of fact, he has a thousand francs to spend every day, and he does as he pleases, the dear child. And besides, I am so fond of him that if he gave me a box on the ear on one side, I should hold out the other to him! The most difficult things he will tell me to do, and yet I do them, you know! He gives me such a lot of trifles to attend to, that I am well set to work! He reads the newspapers, doesn't he? Well, my instructions are

to put them always in the same place, on the same table. I always go at the same hour and shave him myself; and don't I tremble! The cook would forfeit the annuity of a thousand crowns that he is to come into after my lord's death, if breakfast is not served *inconciliably* at ten o'clock precisely. The menus are drawn up for the whole year round, day after day. My Lord the Marquis has not a thing to wish for. He has strawberries whenever there are any, and he has the earliest mackerel to be had in Paris. The programme is printed every morning. He knows his dinner by rote. In the next place, he dresses himself at the same hour, in the same clothes, the same linen, that I always put on the same chair, you understand? I have to see that he always has the same cloth; and if it should happen that his coat came to grief (a mere supposition), I should have to replace it by another without saying a word about it to him. If it is fine, I go in and say to my master:

"'You ought to go out, sir.'

"He says Yes, or No. If he has a notion that he will go out, he doesn't wait for his horses; they are always ready harnessed; the coachman stops there *inconciliably,* whip in hand, just as you see him out there. In the evening, after dinner, my master goes one day to the Opera, the other to the Ital——no, he hasn't yet gone to the Italiens, though, for I could not find a box for him until yesterday. Then he comes in at eleven o'clock precisely, to go to bed. At any time in the day when he has nothing to do, he reads—he is always reading, you see—it is a notion he has. My instructions are to read the *Journal de la Librairie* before he sees it, and to buy new books, so that he finds them on his chimney-piece on the very day that they are published. I have orders to go into his room every hour or so, to look after the fire and everything else, and to see that he wants nothing. He gave me a little book, sir, to learn off by heart, with all my duties written in it—a regular catechism! In summer I have to keep a cool and even temperature with blocks of ice, and at all seasons to put fresh flowers all about. He is rich!

He has a thousand francs to spend every day; he can indulge his fancies! And he hadn't even necessaries for so long, poor child! He doesn't annoy anybody; he is as good as gold; he never opens his mouth, for instance; the house and garden are absolutely silent. In short, my master has not a single wish left; everything comes in the twinkling of an eye, if he raises his hand, and *instanter*. Quite right, too. If servants are not looked after, everything falls into confusion. You would never believe the lengths he goes about things. His rooms are all—what do you call it?—er—er—*en suite*. Very well; just suppose, now, that he opens his room door or the door of his study; presto! all the other doors fly open of themselves by a patent contrivance; and then he can go from one end of the house to the other and not find a single door shut; which is all very nice and pleasant and convenient for us great folk! But, on my word, it cost us a lot of money! And, after all, M. Porriquet, he said to me at last:

"'Jonathan, you will look after me as if I were a baby in long clothes.' Yes, sir, 'long clothes!' those were his very words. 'You will think of all my requirements for me.' I am the master, so to speak, and he is the servant, you understand? The reason of it? Ah, my word, that is just what nobody on earth knows but he himself and God Almighty. It is quite *inconciliable!*"

"He is writing a poem!" exclaimed the old professor.

"You think he is writing a poem, sir? It's a very absorbing affair, then! But, you know, I don't think he is. He often tells me that he wants to live like a *vergetation;* he wants to *vergetate*. Only yesterday he was looking at a tulip while he was dressing, and he said to me:

"'There is my own life—I am *vergetating,* my poor Jonathan.' Now, some of them insist that that is monomania. It is *inconciliable!*"

"All this makes is very clear to me, Jonathan," the professor answered, with a magisterial solemnity that greatly impressed the old servant, "that your master is absorbed in a great work. He is deep in vast meditations, and has no wish to

be distracted by the petty preoccupations of ordinary life. A man of genius forgets everything among his intellectual labors. One day the famous Newton——"

"Newton?—oh, ah! I don't know the name," said Jonathan.

"Newton, a great geometrician," Porriquet went on, "once sat for twenty-four hours leaning his elbow on the table; when he emerged from his musings, he was a day out in his reckoning, just as if he had been sleeping. I will go to see him, dear lad; I may perhaps be of some use to him."

"Not for a moment!" Jonathan cried. "Not though you were King of France—I mean the real old one. You could not go in unless you forced the doors open and walked over my body. But I will go and tell him you are here, M. Porriquet, and I will put it to him like this, 'Ought he to come up?' And he will say Yes or No. I never say, 'Do you wish?' or 'Will you?' or 'Do you want?' Those words are scratched out of the dictionary. He let out at me once with a 'Do you want to kill me?' he was so very angry."

Jonathan left the old schoolmaster in the vestibule, signing to him to come no further, and soon returned with a favorable answer. He led the old gentleman through one magnificent room after another, where every door stood open. At last Porriquet beheld his pupil at some distance seated beside the fire.

Raphael was reading the paper. He sat in an armchair, wrapped in a dressing-gown with some large pattern on it. The intense melancholy that preyed upon him could be discerned in his languid posture and feeble frame; it was depicted on his brow and white face; he looked like some plant bleached by darkness. There was a kind of effeminate grace about him; the fancies peculiar to wealthy invalids were also noticeable. His hands were soft and white, like a pretty woman's; he wore his fair hair, now grown scanty, curled about his temples with a refinement of vanity.

The Greek cap that he wore was pulled to one side by the weight of its tassel; too heavy for the light material of which

it was made. He had let the paper-knife fall at his feet, a malachite blade with gold mounting, which he had used to cut the leaves of a book. The amber mouthpiece of a magnificent Indian hookah lay on his knee; the enameled coils lay like a serpent in the room, but he had forgotten to draw out its fresh perfume. And yet there was a complete contradiction between the general feebleness of his young frame and the blue eyes, where all his vitality seemed to dwell; an extraordinary intelligence seemed to look out from them and to grasp everything at once.

That expression was painful to see. Some would have read despair in it, and others some inner conflict terrible as remorse. It was the inscrutable glance of helplessness that must perforce consign its desires to the depths of its own heart; or of a miser enjoying in imagination all the pleasures that his money could procure for him, while he declines to lessen his hoard; the look of a bound Prometheus, of the fallen Napoleon of 1815, when he learned at the Elysée the strategical blunder that his enemies had made, and asked for twenty-four hours of command in vain; or rather it was the same look that Raphael had turned upon the Seine, or upon his last piece of gold at the gaming-table only a few months ago.

He was submitting his intelligence and his will to the homely common-sense of an old peasant whom fifty years of domestic service had scarcely civilized. He had given up all the rights of life in order to live; he had despoiled his soul of all the romance that lies in a wish; and almost rejoiced at thus becoming a sort of automaton. The better to struggle with the cruel power that he had challenged, he had followed Origen's example, and had maimed and chastened his imagination.

The day after he had seen the diminution of the Magic Skin, at his sudden accession of wealth, he happened to be at his notary's house. A well-known physician had told them quite seriously, at dessert, how a Swiss attacked by consumption had cured himself. The man had never spoken a word

for ten years, and had compelled himself to draw six breaths only, every minute, in the close atmosphere of a cow-house, adhering all the time to a regimen of exceedingly light diet. "I will be like that man," thought Raphael to himself. He wanted life at any price, and so he led the life of a machine in the midst of all the luxury around him.

The old professor confronted this youthful corpse and shuddered; there seemed something unnatural about the meagre, enfeebled frame. In the Marquis, with his eager eyes and careworn forehead, he could hardly recognize the fresh-cheeked and rosy pupil with the active limbs, whom he remembered. If the worthy classicist, sage critic, and general preserver of the traditions of correct taste had read Byron, he would have thought that he had come on a Manfred when he looked to find Childe Harold.

"Good day, père Porriquet," said Raphael, pressing the old schoolmaster's frozen fingers in his own hot damp ones; "how are you?"

"I am very well," replied the other, alarmed by the touch of that feverish hand. "But how about you?"

"Oh, I am hoping to keep myself in health."

"You are engaged in some great work, no doubt?"

"No," Raphael answered. "*Exegi monumentum*, père Porriquet; I have contributed an important page to science, and have now bidden her farewell for ever. I scarcely know where my manuscript is."

"The style is no doubt correct?" queried the schoolmaster. "You, I hope, would never have adopted the barbarous language of the new school, which fancies it has worked such wonders by discovering Ronsard!"

"My work treats of physiology pure and simple."

"Oh, then, there is no more to be said," the schoolmaster answered. "Grammar must yield to the exigencies of discovery. Nevertheless, young man, a lucid and harmonious style—the diction of Massillon, of M. de Buffon, of the great Racine—a classical style, in short, can never spoil anything—— But, my friend," the schoolmaster interrupted

himself, "I was forgetting the object of my visit, which concerns my own interests."

Too late Raphael recalled to mind the verbose eloquence and elegant circumlocutions which in a long professorial career had grown habitual to his old tutor, and almost regretted that he had admitted him; but just as he was about to wish to see him safely outside, he promptly suppressed his secret desire with a stealthy glance at the Magic Skin. It hung there before him, fastened down upon some white material, surrounded by a red line accurately traced about its prophetic outlines. Since that fatal carouse, Raphael had stifled every least whim, and had lived so as not to cause the slightest movement in the terrible talisman. The Magic Skin was like a tiger with which he must live without exciting its ferocity. He bore patiently, therefore, with the old schoolmaster's prolixity.

Porriquet spent an hour in telling him about the persecutions directed against him ever since the Revolution of July. The worthy man, having a liking for strong governments, had expressed the patriotic wish that grocers should be left to their counters, statesmen to the management of public business, advocates to the Palais de Justice, and peers of France to the Luxembourg; but one of the popularity-seeking ministers of the Citizen King had ousted him from his chair, on an accusation of Charlism, and the old man now found himself without pension or post, and with no bread to eat. As he played the part of guardian angel to a poor nephew, for whose schooling at Saint Sulpice he was paying, he came less on his own account than for his adopted child's sake, to entreat his former pupil's interest with the new minister. He did not ask to be reinstated, but only for a position at the head of some provincial school.

Raphael had fallen a victim to unconquerable drowsiness by the time that the worthy man's monotonous voice ceased to sound in his ears. Civility had compelled him to look at the pale and unmoving eyes of the deliberate and tedious old narrator, till he himself had reached stupefaction, magnetized in an inexplicable way by the power of inertia.

"Well, my dear père Porriquet," he said, not very certain what the question was to which he was replying, "but I can do nothing for you, nothing at all. *I wish very heartily* that you may succeed——"

All at once, without seeing the change wrought on the old man's sallow and wrinkled brow by these conventional phrases, full of indifference and selfishness, Raphael sprang to his feet like a startled roebuck. He saw a thin white line between the black piece of hide and the red tracing about it, and gave a cry so fearful that the poor professor was frightened by it.

"Old fool! Go!" he cried. "You will be appointed as headmaster! Couldn't you have asked me for an annuity of a thousand crowns rather than a murderous wish? Your visit would have cost me nothing. There are a hundred thousand situations to be had in France, but I have only one life. A man's life is worth more than all the situations in the world.—Jonathan!"

Jonathan appeared.

"This is your doing, double-distilled idiot! What made you suggest that I should see M. Porriquet?" and he pointed to the old man, who was petrified with fright. "Did I put myself in your hands for you to tear me in pieces? You have just shortened my life by ten years! Another blunder of this kind, and you will lay me where I have laid my father. Would I not far rather have possessed the beautiful Fœdora? And I have obliged that old hulk instead—that rag of humanity! I had money enough for him. And, moreover, if all the Porriquets in the world were dying of hunger, what is that to me?"

Raphael's face was white with anger; a slight froth marked his trembling lips; there was a savage gleam in his eyes. The two elders shook with terror in his presence like two children at the sight of a snake. The young man fell back in his armchair, a kind of reaction took place in him, the tears flowed fast from his angry eyes.

"Oh, my life!" he cried, "that fair life of mine. Never

to know a kindly thought again, to love no more; nothing is left to me!"

He turned to the professor and went on in a gentle voice—"The harm is done, my old friend. Your services have been well repaid; and my misfortune has at any rate contributed to the welfare of a good and worthy man."

His tones betrayed so much feeling that the almost unintelligible words drew tears from the two old men, such tears as are shed over some pathetic song in a foreign tongue.

"He is epileptic," muttered Porriquet.

"I understand your kind intentions, my friend," Raphael answered gently. "You would make excuses for me. Ill-health cannot be helped, but ingratitude is a grievous fault. Leave me now," he added. "To-morrow or the next day, or possibly to-night, you will receive your appointment; Resistance has triumphed over Motion. Farewell."

The old schoolmaster went away, full of keen apprehension as to Valentin's sanity A thrill of horror ran through him; there had been something supernatural, he thought, in the scene he had passed through. He could hardly believe his own impressions, and questioned them like one awakened from a painful dream.

"Now attend to me, Jonathan," said the young man to his old servant. "Try to understand the charge confided to you."

"Yes, my Lord Marquis."

"I am as a man outlawed from humanity."

"Yes, my Lord Marquis."

"All the pleasures of life disport themselves round my bed of death, and dance about me like fair women; but if I beckon to them, I must die. Death always confronts me. You must be the barrier between the world and me."

"Yes, my Lord Marquis," said the old servant, wiping the drops of perspiration from his wrinkled forehead. "But if you don't wish to see pretty women, how will you manage at the Italiens this evening? An English family is returning to London, and I have taken their box for the rest of the sea-

son, and it is in a splendid position—superb; in the first row."

Raphael, deep in his own deep musings, paid no attention to him.

Do you see that splendid equipage, a brougham painted a dark brown color, but with the arms of an ancient and noble family shining from the panels? As it rolls past, all the shop-girls admire it, and look longingly at the yellow satin lining, the rugs from la Savonnerie, the daintiness and freshness of every detail, the silken cushions and tightly-fitting glass windows. Two liveried footmen are mounted behind this aristocratic carriage; and within, a head lies back among the silken cushions, the feverish face and hollow eyes of Raphael, melancholy and sad. Emblem of the doom of wealth! He flies across Paris like a rocket, and reaches the peristyle of the Théâtre Favart. The passers-by make way for him; the two footmen help him to alight, an envious crowd looking on the while.

"What has that fellow done to be so rich?" asks a poor law-student, who cannot listen to the magical music of Rossini for lack of a five-franc piece.

Raphael walked slowly along the gangway; he expected no enjoyment from these pleasures he had once coveted so eagerly. In the interval before the second act of *Semiramide* he walked up and down in the lobby, and along the corridors, leaving his box, which he had not yet entered, to look after itself. The instinct of property was dead within him already. Like all invalids, he thought of nothing but his own sufferings. He was leaning against the chimney-piece in the green-room. A group had gathered about it of dandies, young and old, of ministers and ex-ministers, of peers without peerages, and peerages without peers, for so the Revolution of July had ordered matters. Among a host of adventurers and journalists, in fact, Raphael beheld a strange, unearthly figure a few paces away among the crowd. He went towards this grotesque object to see it better, half-closing his eyes with exceeding superciliousness.

"What a wonderful bit of painting!" he said to himself. The stranger's hair and eyebrows and a Mazarin tuft on the chin had been dyed black, but the result was a spurious, glossy, purple tint that varied its hues according to the light; the hair had been too white, no doubt, to take the preparation. Anxiety and cunning were depicted in the narrow, insignificant face, with its wrinkles incrusted by thick layers of red and white paint. This red enamel, lacking on some portions of his face, strongly brought out his natural feebleness and livid hues. It was impossible not to smile at this visage with the protuberant forehead and pointed chin, a face not unlike those grotesque wooden figures that German herdsmen carve in their spare moments.

An attentive observer looking from Raphael to this elderly Adonis would have remarked a young man's eyes set in a mask of age, in the case of the Marquis, and in the other case the dim eyes of age peering forth from behind a mask of youth. Valentin tried to recollect when and where he had seen this little old man before. He was thin, fastidiously cravatted, booted and spurred like one-and-twenty; he crossed his arms and clinked his spurs as if he possessed all the wanton energy of youth. He seemed to move about without constraint or difficulty. He had carefully buttoned up his fashionable coat, which disguised his powerful, elderly frame, and gave him the appearance of an antiquated coxcomb who still follows the fashions.

For Raphael this animated puppet possessed all the interest of an apparition. He gazed at it as if it had been some smoke-begrimed Rembrandt, recently restored and newly framed. This idea found him a clue to the truth among his confused recollections; he recognized the dealer in antiquities, the man to whom he owed his calamities!

A noiseless laugh broke just then from the fantastical personage, straightening the line of his lips that stretched across a row of artificial teeth. That laugh brought out, for Raphael's heated fancy, a strong resemblance between the man before him and the type of head that painters have

assigned to Goethe's Mephistopheles. A crowd of superstitious thoughts entered Raphael's sceptical mind; he was convinced of the powers of the devil and of all the sorcerer's enchantments embodied in mediæval tradition, and since worked up by poets. Shrinking in horror from the destiny of Faust, he prayed for the protection of Heaven with all the ardent faith of a dying man in God and the Virgin. A clear, bright radiance seemed to give him a glimpse of the heaven of Michael Angelo or of Raphael of Urbino: a venerable white-bearded man, a beautiful woman seated in an aureole above the clouds and winged cherub heads. Now he had grasped and received the meaning of those imaginative, almost human creations; they seemed to explain what had happened to him, to leave him yet one hope.

But when the greenroom of the Italiens returned upon his sight he beheld, not the Virgin, but a very handsome young person The execrable Euphrasia, in all the splendor of her toilette, with its orient pearls, had come thither, impatient for her ardent, elderly admirer. She was insolently exhibiting herself with her defiant face and glittering eyes to an envious crowd of stockbrokers, a visible testimony to the inexhaustible wealth that the old dealer permitted her to squander.

Raphael recollected the mocking wish with which he had accepted the old man's luckless gift, and tasted all the sweets of revenge when he beheld the spectacle of sublime wisdom fallen to such a depth as this, wisdom for which such humiliation had seemed a thing impossible. The centenarian greeted Euphrasia with a ghastly smile, receiving her honeyed words in reply. He offered her his emaciated arm, and went twice or thrice round the greenroom with her; the envious glances and compliments with which the crowd received his mistress delighted him; he did not see the scornful smiles, nor hear the caustic comments to which he gave rise.

"In what cemetery did this young ghoul unearth that corpse of hers?" asked the dandy of the Romantic faction.

Euphrasia began to smile. The speaker was a slender,

fair-haired youth, with bright blue eyes, and a moustache. His short dress coat, hat tilted over one ear, and sharp tongue, all denoted the species.

"How many old men," said Raphael to himself, "bring an upright, virtuous, and hard-working life to a close in folly! His feet are cold already, and he is making love."

"Well, sir," exclaimed Valentin, stopping the merchant's progress, while he stared hard at Euphrasia, "have you quite forgotten the stringent maxims of your philosophy?"

"Ah, I am as happy now as a young man," said the other, in a cracked voice. "I used to look at existence from a wrong standpoint. One hour of love has a whole life in it."

The playgoers heard the bell ring, and left the greenroom to take their places again. Raphael and the old merchant separated. As he entered his box, the Marquis saw Fœdora sitting exactly opposite to him on the other side of the theatre. The Countess had probably only just come, for she was just flinging off her scarf to leave her throat uncovered, and was occupied with going through all the indescribable manœuvres of a coquette arranging herself. All eyes were turned upon her. A young peer of France had come with her; she asked him for the lorgnette she had given him to carry. Raphael knew the despotism to which his successor had resigned himself, in her gestures, and in the way she treated her companion. He was also under the spell no doubt, another dupe beating with all the might of a real affection against the woman's cold calculations, enduring all the tortures from which Valentin had luckily freed himself.

Fœdora's face lighted up with indescribable joy. After directing her lorgnette upon every box in turn, to make a rapid survey of all the dresses, she was conscious that by her toilette and her beauty she had eclipsed the loveliest and best-dressed women in Paris. She laughed to show her white teeth; her head with its wreath of flowers was never still, in her quest of admiration. Her glances went from one box to another, as she diverted herself with the awkward way in which a Russian princess wore her bonnet, or over the utter

failure of a bonnet with which a banker's daughter had disfigured herself.

All at once she met Raphael's steady gaze and turned pale, aghast at the intolerable contempt in her rejected lover's eyes. Not one of her exiled suitors had failed to own her power over them; Valentin alone was proof against her attractions. A power that can be defied with impunity is drawing to its end. This axiom is as deeply engraved on the heart of woman as in the minds of kings. In Raphael, therefore, Fœdora saw the deathblow of her influence and her ability to please. An epigram of his, made at the Opera the day before, was already known in the salons of Paris. The biting edge of that terrible speech had already given the Countess an incurable wound. We know how to cauterize a wound, but we know of no treatment as yet for the stab of a phrase. As every other woman in the house looked by turns at her and at the Marquis, Fœdora would have consigned them all to the oubliettes of some Bastille; for in spite of her capacity for dissumulation, her discomfiture was discerned by her rivals. Her unfailing consolation had slipped from her at last. The delicious thought, "I am the most beautiful," the thought that at all times had soothed every mortification, had turned into a lie.

At the opening of the second act a woman took up her position not very far from Raphael, in a box that had been empty hitherto. A murmur of admiration went up from the whole house. In that sea of human faces there was a movement of every living wave; all eyes were turned upon the stranger lady. The applause of young and old was so prolonged, that when the orchestra began, the musicians turned to the audience to request silence, and then they themselves joined in the plaudits and swelled the confusion. Excited talk began in every box, every woman equipped herself with an opera glass, elderly men grew young again, and polished the glasses of their lorgnettes with their gloves. The enthusiasm subsided by degrees, the stage echoed with the voices of the singers, and order reigned as before. The aristocratic section,

ashamed of having yielded to a spontaneous feeling, again assumed their wonted politely frigid manner. The well-to-do dislike to be astonished at anything; at the first sight of a beautiful thing it becomes their duty to discover the defect in it which absolves them from admiring it,—the feeling of all ordinary minds. Yet a few still remained motionless and heedless of the music, artlessly absorbed in the delight of watching Raphael's neighbor.

Valentin noticed Taillefer's mean, obnoxious countenance by Aquilina's side in a lower box, and received an approving smirk from him. Then he saw Émile, who seemed to say from where he stood in the orchestra, "Just look at that lovely creature there, close beside you!" Lastly, he saw Rastignac, with Mme. de Nucingen and her daughter, twisting his gloves like a man in despair, because he was tethered to his place, and could not leave it to go any nearer to the unknown fair divinity.

Raphael's life depended upon a covenant that he had made with himself, and had hitherto kept sacred. He would give no special heed to any woman whatever; and the better to guard against temptation, he used a cunningly contrived opera-glass which destroyed the harmony of the fairest features by hideous distortions. He had not recovered from the terror that had seized on him in the morning when, at a mere expression of civility, the Magic Skin had contracted so abruptly. So Raphael was determined not to turn his face in the direction of his neighbor. He sat imperturbable as a duchess with his back against the corner of the box, thereby shutting out half of his neighbor's view of the stage, appearing to disregard her, and even to be unaware that a pretty woman sat there just behind him.

His neighbor copied Valentin's position exactly; she leaned her elbow on the edge of her box and turned her face in three-quarter profile upon the singers on the stage, as if she were sitting to a painter. These two people looked like two estranged lovers still sulking, still turning their backs upon each other, who will go into each other's arms at the first tender word.

Now and again his neighbor's ostrich feathers or her hair came in contact with Raphael's head, giving him a pleasurable thrill, against which he sternly fought. In a little while he felt the touch of the soft frill of lace that went round her dress; he could hear the gracious sounds of the folds of her dress itself, light rustling noises full of enchantment; he could even feel her movements as she breathed, with the gentle stir thus imparted to her form and to her draperies, it seemed to Raphael that all her being was suddenly communicated to him in an electric spark. The lace and tulle that caressed him imparted the delicious warmth of her bare, white shoulders. By a freak in the ordering of things, these two creatures, kept apart by social conventions, with the abysses of death between them, breathed together and perhaps thought of one another. Finally, the subtle perfume of aloes completed the work of Raphael's intoxication. Opposition heated his imagination, and his fancy, become the wilder for the limits imposed upon it, sketched a woman for him in outlines of fire. He turned abruptly, the stranger made a similar movement, startled no doubt at being brought in contact with a stranger; and they remained face to face, each with the same thought.

"Pauline!"

"M. Raphael!"

Each surveyed the other, both of them petrified with astonishment. Raphael noticed Pauline's daintily simple costume. A woman's experienced eyes would have discerned and admired the outlines beneath the modest gauze folds of her bodice and the lily whiteness of her throat. And then her more than mortal clearness of soul, her maidenly modesty, her graceful bearing, all were unchanged. Her sleeve was quivering with agitation, for the beating of her heart was shaking her whole frame.

"Come to the Hôtel de Saint-Quentin to-morrow for your papers," she said. "I will be there at noon. Be punctual."

She rose hastily, and disappeared. Raphael thought of following Pauline, feared to compromise her, and stayed. He looked at Fœdora; she seemed to him positively ugly. Unable

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"I want Pauline to love me!" he cried next morning, looking at the talisman the while in unspeakable anguish

to understand a single phrase of the music, and feeling stifled in the theatre, he went out, and returned home with a full heart.

"Jonathan," he said to the old servant, as soon as he lay in bed, "give me half a drop of laudanum on a piece of sugar, and don't wake me to-morrow till twenty minutes to twelve."

"I want Pauline to love me!" he cried next morning, looking at the talisman the while in unspeakable anguish.

The skin did not move in the least; it seemed to have lost its power to shrink; doubtless it could not fulfil a wish fulfilled already.

"Ah!" exclaimed Raphael, feeling as if a mantle of lead had fallen away, which he had worn ever since the day when the talisman had been given to him; "so you are playing me false, you are not obeying me, the pact is broken! I am free; I shall live. Then was it all a wretched joke?" But he did not dare to believe in his own thought as he uttered it.

He dressed himself as simply as had formerly been his wont, and set out on foot for his old lodging, trying to go back in fancy to the happy days when he abandoned himself without peril to vehement desires, the days when he had not yet condemned all human enjoyment. As he walked he beheld Pauline—not the Pauline of the Hôtel Saint-Quentin, but the Pauline of last evening. Here was the accomplished mistress he had so often dreamed of, the intelligent young girl with the loving nature and artistic temperament, who understood poets, who understood poetry, and lived in luxurious surroundings. Here, in short, was Fœdora, gifted with a great soul; or Pauline become a countess, and twice a millionaire, as Fœdora had been. When he reached the worn threshold, and stood upon the broken step at the door, where in old days he had had so many desperate thoughts, an old woman came out of the room within and spoke to him.

"You are M. Raphael de Valentin, are you not?"

"Yes, good mother," he replied.

"You know your old room then," she replied; "you are expected up there."

"Does Mme. Gaudin still own the house?" Raphael asked.

"Oh no, sir. Mme. Gaudin is a baroness now. She lives in a fine house of her own on the other side of the river. Her husband has come back. My goodness, he brought back thousands and thousands. They say she could buy up all the Quartier Saint-Jacques if she liked. She gave me her basement room for nothing, and the remainder of her lease. Ah, she's a kind woman all the same; she is no more proud to-day than she was yesterday."

Raphael hurried up the staircase to his garret; as he reached the last few steps he heard the sounds of a piano. Pauline was there, simply dressed in a cotton gown, but the way that it was made, like the gloves, hat, and shawl that she had thrown down carelessly upon the bed, revealed a change of fortune.

"Ah, there you are!" cried Pauline, turning her head, and rising with unconcealed delight.

Raphael went to sit beside her, flushed, confused, and happy; he looked at her in silence.

"Why did you leave us then?" she asked, dropping her eyes as the flush deepened on his face. "What became of you?"

"Ah, I have been very miserable, Pauline; I am very miserable still."

"Alas!" she said, filled with pitying tenderness. "I guessed your fate yesterday when I saw you so well dressed, and apparently so wealthy; but in reality? Eh, M. Raphael, is it as it always used to be with you?"

Valentin could not restrain the tears that sprang to his eyes.

"Pauline," he exclaimed, "I——"

He went no further, love sparkled in his eyes, and his emotion overflowed his face.

"Oh, he loves me! he loves me!" cried Pauline.

Raphael felt himself unable to say one word; he bent his head. The young girl took his hand at this; she pressed it as she said, half sobbing and half laughing:—

"Rich, rich, happy and rich! Your Pauline is rich. But

I? Oh, I ought to be very poor to-day. I have said, times without number, that I would give all the wealth upon this earth for those words, 'He loves me!' O my Raphael! I have millions. You like luxury, you will be glad; but you must love me and my heart besides, for there is so much love for you in my heart. You don't know? My father has come back. I am a wealthy heiress. Both he and my mother leave me completely free to decide my own fate. I am free—do you understand?"

Seized with a kind of frenzy, Raphael grasped Pauline's hands and kissed them eagerly and vehemently, with an almost convulsive caress. Pauline drew her hands away, laid them on Raphael's shoulders, and drew him towards her. They understood one another—in that close embrace, in the unalloyed and sacred fervor of that one kiss without an afterthought—the first kiss by which two souls take possession of each other.

"Ah, I will not leave you any more," said Pauline, falling back in her chair. "I do not know how I come to be so bold!" she added, blushing.

"Bold, my Pauline? Do not fear it. It is love, love true and deep and everlasting like my own, is it not?"

"Speak!" she cried. "Go on speaking, so long your lips have been dumb for me."

"Then you have loved me all along?"

"Loved you? *Mon Dieu!* How often I have wept here, setting your room straight, and grieving for your poverty and my own. I would have sold myself to the evil one to spare you one vexation! You are *my* Raphael to-day, really my own Raphael, with that handsome head of yours, and your heart is mine too; yes, that above all, your heart—O wealth inexhaustible! Well, where was I?" she went on after a pause. "Oh yes! We have three, four, or five millions, I believe. If I were poor, I should perhaps desire to bear your name, to be acknowledged as your wife; but as it is, I would give up the whole world for you, I would be your servant still, now and always. Why, Raphael, if I give you my for-

tune, my heart, myself to-day, I do no more than I did that day when I put a certain five-franc piece in the drawer there," and she pointed to the table. "Oh, how your exultation hurt me then!"

"Oh, why are you rich?" Raphael cried; "why is there no vanity in you? I can do nothing for you."

He wrung his hands in despair and happiness and love.

"When you are the Marquise de Valentin, I know that the title and the fortune for thee, heavenly soul, will not be worth——"

"One hair of your head," she cried.

"I have millions too. But what is wealth to either of us now? There is my life—ah, that I can offer, take it."

"Your love, Raphael, your love is all the world to me. Are your thoughts of me? I am the happiest of the happy!"

"Can any one overhear us?" asked Raphael.

"Nobody," she replied, and a mischievous gesture escaped her.

"Come, then!" cried Valentin, holding out his arms.

She sprang upon his knees and clasped her arms about his neck.

"Kiss me!" she cried, "after all the pain you have given me; to blot out the memory of the grief that your joys have caused me; and for the sake of the nights that I spent in painting hand-screens——"

"Those hand-screens of yours?"

"Now that we are rich, my darling, I can tell you all about it. Poor boy! how easy it is to delude a clever man! Could you have had white waistcoats and clean shirts twice a week for three francs every month to the laundress? Why, you used to drink twice as much milk as your money would have paid for. I deceived you all round—over firing, oil, and even money. O Raphael mine, don't have me for your wife, I am far too cunning!" she said laughing.

"But how did you manage?"

"I used to work till two o'clock in the morning; I gave my

mother half the money made by my screens, and the other half went to you."

They looked at one another for a moment, both bewildered by love and gladness.

"Some day we shall have to pay for this happiness by some terrible sorrow," cried Raphael.

"Perhaps you are married?" said Pauline. "Oh, I will not give you up to any other woman."

"I am free, my beloved."

"Free!" she repeated. "Free, and mine!"

She slipped down upon her knees, clasped her hands, and looked at Raphael in an enthusiasm of devotion.

"I am afraid I shall go mad. How handsome you are!" she went on, passing her fingers through her lover's fair hair. "How stupid your Countess Fœdora is! How pleased I was yesterday with the homage they all paid to me! *She* has never been applauded. Dear, when I felt your arm against my back, I heard a vague voice within me that cried, 'He is there!' and I turned round and saw you. I fled, for I longed so to throw my arms about you before them all."

"How happy you are—you can speak!" Raphael exclaimed. "My heart is overwhelmed; I would weep, but I cannot. Do not draw your hand away. I could stay here looking at you like this for the rest of my life, I think; happy and content."

"O my love, say that once more!"

"Ah, what are words?" answered Valentin, letting a hot tear fall on Pauline's hands. "Some time I will try to tell you of my love; just now I can only feel it."

"You," she said, "with your lofty soul and your great genius, with that heart of yours that I know so well; are you really mine, as I am yours?"

"For ever and ever, my sweet creature," said Raphael in an uncertain voice. "You shall be my wife, my protecting angel. My griefs have always been dispelled by your presence, and my courage revived; that angelic smile now on your lips has purified me, so to speak. A new life seems about to begin for me. The cruel past and my wretched follies are hardly more

to me than evil dreams. At your side I breathe an atmosphere of happiness, and I am pure. Be with me always," he added, pressing her solemnly to his beating heart.

"Death may come when it will," said Pauline in ecstasy; "I have lived!"

Happy he who shall divine their joy, for he must have experienced it.

"I wish that no one might enter this dear garret again, my Raphael," said Pauline, after two hours of silence.

"We must have the door walled up, put bars across the window, and buy the house," the Marquis answered.

"Yes, we will," she said. Then a moment later she added: "Our search for your manuscripts has been a little lost sight of," and they both laughed like children.

"Pshaw! I don't care a jot for the whole circle of the sciences," Raphael answered.

"Ah, sir, and how about glory?"

"I glory in you alone."

"You used to be very miserable as you made these little scratches and scrawls," she said, turning the papers over.

"My Pauline——"

"Oh yes, I am your Pauline—and what then?"

"Where are you living now?"

"In the Rue Saint Lazare. And you?"

"In the Rue de Varenne."

"What a long way apart we shall be until——" She stopped, and looked at her lover with a mischievous and coquettish expression.

"But at the most we need only be separated for a fortnight," Raphael answered.

"Really! we are to be married in a fortnight?" and she jumped for joy like a child.

"I am an unnatural daughter!" she went on. "I give no more thought to my father or my mother, or to anything in the world. Poor love, you don't know that my father is very ill? He returned from the Indies in very bad health. He nearly died at Havre, where we went to find him. Good

heavens!" she cried, looking at her watch; "it is three o'clock already! I ought to be back again when he wakes at four. I am mistress of the house at home; my mother does everything that I wish, and my father worships me; but I will not abuse their kindness, that would be wrong. My poor father! He would have me go to the Italiens yesterday. You will come to see him to-morrow, will you not?"

"Will Madame la Marquise de Valentin honor me by taking my arm?"

"I am going to take the key of this room away with me," she said. "Isn't our treasure-house a palace?"

"One more kiss, Pauline."

"A thousand, *mon Dieu!*" she said, looking at Raphael. "Will it always be like this? I feel as if I were dreaming."

They went slowly down the stairs together, step for step, with arms closely linked, trembling both of them beneath their load of joy. Each pressing close to the other's side, like a pair of doves, they reached the Place de la Sorbonne, where Pauline's carriage was waiting.

"I want to go home with you," she said. "I want to see your own room and your study, and to sit at the table where you work. It will be like old times," she said, blushing.

She spoke to the servant. "Joseph, before returning home I am going to the Rue de Varenne. It is a quarter-past three now, and I must be back again by four o'clock. George must hurry the horses." And so in a few moments the lovers came to Valentin's abode.

"How glad I am to have seen all this for myself!" Pauline cried, creasing the silken bed-curtains in Raphael's room between her fingers. "As I go to sleep, I shall be here in thought. I shall imagine your dear head on the pillow there. Raphael, tell me, did no one advise you about the furniture of your hôtel?"

"No one whatever."

"Really? It was not a woman who——"

"Pauline!"

"Oh, I know I am fearfully jealous. You have good taste. I will have a bed like yours to-morrow."

Quite beside himself with happiness, Raphael caught Pauline in his arms.

"Oh, my father!" she said; "my father——"

"I will take you back to him," cried Valentin, "for I want to be away from you as little as possible."

"How loving you are! I did not venture to suggest it——"

"Are you not my life?"

It would be tedious to set down accurately the charming prattle of the lovers, for tones and looks and gestures that cannot be rendered alone gave it significance. Valentin went back with Pauline to her own door, and returned with as much happiness in his heart as mortal man can know.

When he was seated in his armchair beside the fire, thinking over the sudden and complete way in which his wishes had been fulfilled, a cold shiver went through him, as if the blade of a dagger had been plunged into his breast—he thought of the Magic Skin, and saw that it had shrunk a little. He uttered the most tremendous of French oaths, without any of the Jesuitical reservations made by the Abbess of Andouillettes, leant his head against the back of the chair, and sat motionless, fixing his unseeing eyes upon the bracket of the curtain pole.

"Good God!" he cried; "every wish! Every desire of mine! Poor Pauline!——"

He took a pair of compasses and measured the extent of existence that the morning had cost him.

"I have scarcely enough for two months!" he said.

A cold sweat broke out over him; moved by an ungovernable spasm of rage, he seized the Magic Skin, exclaiming:

"I am a perfect fool!"

He rushed out of the house and across the garden, and flung the talisman down a well.

"*Vogue la galère,*" cried he. "The devil take all this nonsense."

So Raphael gave himself up to the happiness of being beloved, and led with Pauline the life of heart and heart.

Difficulties which it would be somewhat tedious to describe had delayed their marriage, which was to take place early in March. Each was sure of the other; their affection had been tried, and happiness had taught them how strong it was. Never has love made two souls, two natures, so absolutely one. The more they came to know of each other, the more they loved. On either side there was the same hesitating delicacy, the same transports of joy such as angels know; there were no clouds in their heaven; the will of either was the other's law.

Wealthy as they both were, they had not a caprice which they could not gratify, and for that reason had no caprices. A refined taste, a feeling for beauty and poetry, was instinct in the soul of the bride; her lover's smile was more to her than all the pearls of Ormuz. She disdained feminine finery; a muslin dress and flowers formed her most elaborate toilette.

Pauline and Raphael shunned every one else, for solitude was abundantly beautiful to them. The idlers at the Opera, or at the Italiens, saw this charming and unconventional pair evening after evening. Some gossip went the round of the salons at first, but the harmless lovers were soon forgotten in the course of events which took place in Paris; their marriage was announced at length to excuse them in the eyes of the prudish; and as it happened, their servants did not babble; so their bliss did not draw down upon them any very severe punishment.

One morning towards the end of February, at the time when the brightening days bring a belief in the nearness of the joys of spring, Pauline and Raphael were breakfasting together in a small conservatory, a kind of a drawing-room filled with flowers, on a level with the garden. The mild rays of the pale winter sunlight, breaking through the thicket of exotic plants, warmed the air somewhat. The vivid contrast made by the varieties of foliage, the colors of the masses of flowering shrubs, the freaks of light and shadow, gladdened the eyes. While all the rest of Paris still sought

warmth from its melancholy hearth, these two were laughing in a bower of camellias, lilacs, and blossoming heath. Their happy faces rose above lilies of the valley, narcissus blooms, and Bengal roses. A mat of plaited African grass, variegated like a carpet, lay beneath their feet in this luxurious conservatory. The walls, covered with a green linen material, bore no traces of damp. The surfaces of the rustic wooden furniture shone with cleanliness. A kitten, attracted by the odor of milk, had established itself upon the table; it allowed Pauline to bedabble it in coffee; she was playing merrily with it, taking away the cream that she had just allowed the kitten to sniff at, so as to exercise its patience, and keep up the contest. She burst out laughing at every antic, and by the comical remarks she constantly made, she hindered Raphael from perusing the paper; he had dropped it a dozen times already. This morning picture seemed to overflow with inexpressible gladness, like everything that is natural and genuine.

Raphael, still pretending to read his paper, furtively watched Pauline with the cat—his Pauline, in the dressing-gown that hung carelessly about her; his Pauline, with her hair loose on her shoulders, with a tiny, white, blue-veined foot peeping out of a velvet slipper. It was pleasant to see her in this negligent dress; she was delightful as some fanciful picture by Westall; half-girl, half-woman, as she seemed to be, or perhaps more of a girl than a woman, there was no alloy in the happiness she enjoyed, and of love she knew as yet only its first ecstasy. When Raphael, absorbed in happy musing, had forgotten the existence of the newspaper, Pauline flew upon it, crumpled it up into a ball, and threw it out into the garden; the kitten sprang after the rotating object, which spun round and round, as politics are wont to do. This childish scene recalled Raphael to himself. He would have gone on reading, and felt for the sheet that he no longer possessed. Joyous laughter rang out like the song of a bird, one peal leading to another.

"I am quite jealous of the paper," she said, as she wiped

away the tears that her childlike merriment had brought into her eyes. "Now, is it not a heinous offence," she went on, as she became a woman all at once, "to read Russian proclamations in my presence, and to attend to the prosings of the Emperor Nicholas rather than to looks and words of love!"

"I was not reading, my dear angel; I was looking at you."

Just then the gravel walk outside the conservatory rang with the sound of the gardener's heavily nailed boots.

"I beg your pardon, my Lord Marquis—and yours, too, madame—if I am intruding, but I have brought you a curiosity the like of which I never set eyes on. Drawing a bucket of water just now, with due respect, I got out this strange salt-water plant. Here it is. It must be thoroughly used to water, anyhow, for it isn't saturated or even damp at all. It is as dry as a piece of wood, and has not swelled a bit. As my Lord Marquis certainly knows a great deal more about things than I do, I thought I ought to bring it, and that it would interest him."

Therewith the gardener showed Raphael the inexorable piece of skin; there were barely six square inches of it left.

"Thanks, Vanière," Raphael said. "The thing is very curious."

"What is the matter with you, my angel; you are growing quite white!" Pauline cried.

"You can go, Vanière."

"Your voice frightens me," the girl went on; "it is so strangely altered. What is it? How are you feeling? Where is the pain? You are in pain!—Jonathan! here! call a doctor!" she cried.

"Hush, my Pauline," Raphael answered, as he regained composure. "Let us get up and go. Some flower here has a scent that is too much for me. It is that verbena, perhaps."

Pauline flew upon the innocent plant, seized it by the stalk, and flung it out into the garden; then with all the

might of the love between them, she clasped Raphael in a close embrace, and with languishing coquetry raised her red lips to his for a kiss.

"Dear angel," she cried, "when I saw you turn so white, I understood that I could not live on without you; your life is my life too. Lay your hand on my back, Raphael mine; I feel a chill like death. The feeling of cold is there yet. Your lips are burning. How is your hand?—Cold as ice," she added.

"Mad girl!" exclaimed Raphael.

"Why that tear? Let me drink it."

"O Pauline, Pauline, you love me far too much!"

"There is something very extraordinary going on in your mind, Raphael! Do not dissimulate. I shall very soon find out your secret. Give that to me," she went on, taking the Magic Skin.

"You are my executioner!" the young man exclaimed, glancing in horror at the talisman.

"How changed your voice is!" cried Pauline, as she dropped the fatal symbol of destiny.

"Do you love me?" he asked.

"Do I love you? Is there any doubt?"

"Then, leave me; go away!"

The poor child went.

"So!" cried Raphael, when he was alone. "In an enlightened age, when we have found out that diamonds are a crystallized form of charcoal, at a time when everything is made clear, when the police would hale a new Messiah before the magistrates, and submit his miracles to the Académie des Sciences—in an epoch when we no longer believe in anything but a notary's signature—that I, forsooth, should believe in a sort of *Mene, Tekel, Upharsin!* No, by Heaven, I will not believe that the Supreme Being would take pleasure in torturing a harmless creature.—Let us see the learned about it."

Between the Halle des Vins, with its extensive assembly of barrels, and the Salpêtrière, that extensive seminary of

drunkenness, lies a small pond, which Raphael soon reached. All sorts of ducks of rare varieties were there disporting themselves; their colored markings shone in the sun like the glass in cathedral windows. Every kind of duck in the world was represented, quacking, dabbling, and moving about—a kind of parliament of ducks assembled against its will, but luckily without either charter or political principles, living in complete immunity from sportsmen, under the eyes of any naturalist that chanced to see them.

"That is M. Lavrille," said one of the keepers to Raphael, who had asked for that high priest of zoology.

The Marquis saw a short man buried in profound reflections, caused by the appearance of a pair of ducks. The man of science was middle-aged; he had a pleasant face, made pleasanter still by a kindly expression, but an absorption in scientific ideas engrossed his whole person. His peruke was strangely turned up, by being constantly raised to scratch his head; so that a line of white hair was left plainly visible, a witness to an enthusiasm for investigation, which, like every other strong passion, so withdraws us from mundane considerations, that we lose all consciousness of the "I" within us. Raphael, the student and man of science, looked respectfully at the naturalist, who devoted his nights to enlarging the limits of human knowledge, and whose very errors reflected glory upon France; but a she-coxcomb would have laughed, no doubt, at the break in continuity between the breeches and striped waistcoat worn by the man of learning; the interval, moreover, was modestly filled by a shirt which had been considerably creased, for he stooped and raised himself by turns, as his zoological observations required.

After the first interchange of civilities, Raphael thought it necessary to pay M. Lavrille a banal compliment upon his ducks.

"Oh, we are well off for ducks," the naturalist replied. "The genus, moreover, as you doubtless know, is the most prolific in the order of palmipeds. It begins with the

swan and ends with the *zin-zin* duck, comprising in all one hundred and thirty-seven very distinct varieties, each having its own name, habits, country, and character, and every one no more like another than a white man is like a negro. Really, sir, when we dine off a duck, we have no notion for the most part of the vast extent——"

He interrupted himself as he saw a small pretty duck come up to the surface of the pond.

"There you see the cravatted swan, a poor native of Canada; he has come a very long way to show us his brown and gray plumage and his little black cravat! Look, he is preening himself. That one is the famous eider duck that provides the down, the eider-down under which our fine ladies sleep; isn't it pretty? Who would not admire the little pinkish white breast and the green beak? I have just been a witness, sir," he went on, "to a marriage that I had long despaired of bringing about; they have paired rather auspiciously, and I shall await the results very eagerly. This will be a hundred and thirty-eighth species, I flatter myself, to which, perhaps, my name will be given. That is the newly mated pair," he said, pointing out two of the ducks; "one of them is a laughing goose (*anas albifrons*), and the other the great whistling duck, Buffon's *anas ruffina.* I have hesitated a long while between the whistling duck, the duck with white eyebrows, and the shoveler duck (*anas clypeata*). Stay, that is the shoveler—that fat, brownish black rascal, with the greenish neck and that coquettish iridescence on it. But the whistling duck was a crested one, sir, and you will understand that I deliberated no longer. We only lack the variegated black-capped duck now. These gentlemen here, unanimously claim that that variety of duck is only a repetition of the curve-beaked teal, but for my own part,"—and the gesture he made was worth seeing. It expressed at once the modesty and pride of a man of science; the pride full of obstinacy, and the modesty well tempered with assurance.

"I don't think it is," he added. "You see, my dear sir,

that we are not amusing ourselves here. I am engaged at this moment upon a monograph on the genus duck. But I am at your disposal."

While they went towards a rather pleasant house in the Rue de Buffon, Raphael submitted the skin to M. Lavrille's inspection.

"I know the product," said the man of science, when he had turned his magnifying glass upon the talisman. "It used to be used for covering boxes. The shagreen is very old. They prefer to use skate's skin nowadays for making sheaths. This, as you are doubtless aware, is the hide of the *raja sephen,* a Red Sea fish."

"But this, sir, since you are so exceedingly good——"

"This," the man of science interrupted, as he resumed, "this is quite another thing; between these two shagreens, sir, there is a difference just as wide as between sea and land, or fish and flesh. The fish's skin is harder, however, than the skin of the land animal. This," he said, as he indicated the talisman, "is, as you doubtless know, one of the most curious of zoological products."

"But to proceed——" said Raphael.

"This," replied the man of science, as he flung himself down into his armchair, "is an ass' skin, sir."

"Yes, I know," said the young man.

"A very rare variety of ass is found in Persia," the naturalist continued, "the onager of the ancients, *equus asinus,* the *koulan* of the Tartars; Pallas went out there to observe it, and has made it known to science, for as a matter of fact the animal for a long time was believed to be mythical. It is mentioned, as you know, in Holy Scripture; Moses forbade that is should be coupled with its own species, and the onager is yet more famous for the prostitutions of which it was the object, and which are often mentioned by the prophets of the Bible. Pallas, as you know doubtless, states in his *Act. Petrop.* tome II., that these bizarre excesses are still devoutly believed in among the Persians and the Nogais as a sovereign remedy for lumbago and sciatic gout.

We poor Parisians scarcely believe that. The Museum has no example of the onager.

"What a magnificent animal!" he continued. "It is full of mystery; its eyes are provided with a sort of burnished covering, to which the Orientals attribute the powers of fascination; it has a glossier and finer coat than our handsomest horses possess, striped with more or less tawny bands, very much like the zebra's hide. There is something pliant and silky about its hair, which is sleek to the touch. Its powers of sight vie in precision and accuracy with those of man; it is rather larger than our largest domestic donkeys, and is possessed of extraordinary courage. If it is surprised by any chance, it defends itself against the most dangerous wild beasts with remarkable success; the rapidity of its movements can only be compared with the flight of birds; an onager, sir, would run the best Arab or Persian horses to death. According to the father of the conscientious Doctor Niebuhr, whose recent loss we are deploring, as you doubtless know, the ordinary average pace of one of these wonderful creatures would be seven thousand geometric feet per hour. Our own degenerate race of donkeys can give no idea of the ass in his pride and independence. He is active and spirited in his demeanor; he is cunning and sagacious; there is grace about the outlines of his head; every movement is full of attractive charm. In the East he is the king of beasts. Turkish and Persian superstition even credits him with a mysterious origin; and when stories of the prowess attributed to him are told in Thibet or in Tartary, the speakers mingle Solomon's name with that of this noble animal. A tame onager, in short, is worth an enormous amount; it is well-nigh impossible to catch them among the mountains, where they leap like roebucks, and seem as if they could fly like birds. Our myth of the winged horse, our Pegasus, had its origin doubtless in these countries, where the shepherds could see the onager springing from one rock to another. In Persia they breed asses for the saddle, a cross between a tamed onager and a she-ass, and they paint them red, follow-

ing immemorial tradition. Perhaps it was this custom that gave rise to our own proverb, 'Surely as a red donkey.' At some period when natural history was much neglected in France, I think a traveler must have brought over one of these strange beasts that endures servitude with such impatience. Hence the adage. The skin that you have laid before me is the skin of an onager. Opinions differ as to the origin of the name. Some claim that *Chagri* is a Turkish word; others insist that *Chagri* must be the name of the place where this animal product underwent the chemical process of preparation so clearly described by Pallas, to which the peculiar graining that we admire is due; Martellens has written to me saying that *Châagri* is a river——"

"I thank you, sir, for the information that you have given me; it would furnish an admirable footnote for some Dom Calmet or other, if such erudite hermits yet exist; but I have had the honor of pointing out to you that this scrap was in the first instance quite as large as that map," said Raphael, indicating an open atlas to Lavrille; "but it has shrunk visibly in three months' time——"

"Quite so," said the man of science. "I understand. The remains of any substance primarily organic are naturally subject to a process of decay. It is quite easy to understand, and its progress depends upon atmospherical conditions. Even metals contract and expand appreciably, for engineers have remarked somewhat considerable interstices between great blocks of stone originally clamped together with iron bars. The field of science is boundless, but human life is very short, so that we do not claim to be acquainted with all the phenomena of nature."

"Pardon the question that I am about to ask you, sir," Raphael began, half embarrassed, "but are you quite sure that this piece of skin is subject to the ordinary laws of zoology, and that is can be stretched?"

"Certainly——oh, bother!——" muttered M. Lavrille, trying to stretch the talisman. "But if you, sir, will go to

see Planchette," he added, "the celebrated professor of mechanics, he will certainly discover some method of acting upon this skin, of softening and expanding it."

"Ah, sir, you are the preserver of my life," and Raphael took leave of the learned naturalist and hurried off to Planchette, leaving the worthy Lavrille in his study, all among the bottles and dried plants that filled it up.

Quite unconsciously Raphael brought away with him from this visit, all of science that man can grasp, a terminology to wit. Lavrille, the worthy man, was very much like Sancho Panza giving to Don Quixote the history of the goats; he was entertaining himself by making out a list of animals and ticking them off. Even now that his life was nearing its end, he was scarcely acquainted with a mere fraction of the countless numbers of the great tribes that God has scattered, for some unknown end, throughout the ocean of worlds.

Raphael was well pleased. "I shall keep my ass well in hand," cried he. Sterne had said before his day, "Let us take care of our ass, if we wish to live to old age." But it is such a fantastic brute!

Planchette was a tall, thin man, a poet of a surety, lost in one continual thought, and always employed in gazing into the bottomless abyss of Motion. Commonplace minds accuse these lofty intellects of madness; they form a misinterpreted race apart that lives in a wonderful carelessness of luxuries or other people's notions. They will spend whole days at a stretch, smoking a cigar that has gone out, and enter a drawing-room with the buttons on their garments not in every case formally wedded to the button-holes. Some day or other, after a long time spent in measuring space, or in accumulating Xs under Aa-Gg, they succeed in analyzing some natural law, and resolve it into its elemental principles, and all on a sudden the crowd gapes at a new machine; or it is a handcart perhaps that overwhelms us with astonishment by the apt simplicity of its construction. The modest man of science smiles at his admirers, and remarks, "What

is that invention of mine? Nothing whatever. Man cannot create a force; he can but direct it; and science consists in learning from nature."

The mechanician was standing bolt upright, planted on both feet, like some victim dropped straight from the gibbet, when Raphael broke in upon him. He was intently watching an agate ball that rolled over a sun-dial, and awaited its final settlement. The worthy man had received neither pension nor decoration; he had not known how to make the right use of his ability for calculation. He was happy in his life spent on the watch for a discovery; he had no thought either of reputation, of the outer world, nor even of himself, and led the life of science for the sake of science.

"It is inexplicable," he exclaimed. "Ah, your servant, sir," he went on, becoming aware of Raphael's existence. "How is your mother? You must go and see my wife."

"And I also could have lived thus," thought Raphael, as he recalled the learned man from his meditations by asking of him how to produce any effect on the talisman, which he placed before him.

"Although my credulity must amuse you, sir," so the Marquis ended, "I will conceal nothing from you. That skin seems to me to be endowed with an insuperable power of resistance."

"People of fashion, sir, always treat science rather superciliously," said Planchette. "They all talk to us pretty much as the *incroyable* did when he brought some ladies to see Lalande just after an eclipse, and remarked, 'Be so good as to begin it over again!' What effect do you want to produce? The object of the science of mechanics is either the application or the neutralization of the laws of motion. As for motion pure and simple, I tell you humbly, that we cannot possibly define it. That disposed of, unvarying phenomena have been observed which accompany the actions of solids and fluids. If we set up the conditions by which these phenomena are brought to pass, we can transport bodies

or communicate locomotive power to them at a predetermined rate of speed. We can project them, divide them up in a few or an infinite number of pieces, accordingly as we break them or grind them to powder; we can twist bodies or make them rotate, modify, compress, expand, or extend them. The whole science, sir, rests upon a single fact.

"You see this ball," he went on; "here it lies upon this slab. Now, it is over there. What name shall we give to what has taken place, so natural from a physical point of view, so amazing from a moral? Movement, locomotion, changing of place? What prodigious vanity lurks underneath the words. Does a name solve the difficulty? Yet it is the whole of our science for all that. Our machines either make direct use of this agency, this fact, or they convert it. This trifling phenomenon, applied to large masses, would send Paris flying. We can increase speed by an expenditure of force, and augment the force by an increase of speed. But what are speed and force? Our science is as powerless to tell us that as to create motion. Any movement whatever is an immense power, and man does not create power of any kind. Everything is movement, thought itself is a movement, upon movement nature is based. Death is a movement whose limitations are little known. If God is eternal, be sure that He moves perpetually; perhaps God is movement. That is why movement, like God, is inexplicable, unfathomable, unlimited, incomprehensible, intangible. Who has ever touched, comprehended, or measured movement? We feel its effects without seeing it; we can even deny them as we can deny the existence of a God. Where is it? Where is it not? Whence comes it? What is its source? What is its end? It surrounds us, it intrudes upon us, and yet escapes us. It is evident as a fact, obscure as an abstraction; it is at once effect and cause. It requires space, even as we, and what is space? Movement alone recalls it to us; without movement, space is but an empty meaningless word. Like space, like creation, like the infinite, movement is an in-

soluble problem which confounds human reason; man will never conceive it, whatever else he may be permitted to conceive.

"Between each point in space occupied in succession by that ball," continued the man of science, "there is an abyss confronting human reason, an abyss into which Pascal fell. In order to produce any effect upon an unknown substance, we ought first of all to study that substance; to know whether, in accordance with its nature, it will be broken by the force of a blow, or whether it will withstand it; if it breaks in pieces, and you have no wish to split it up, we shall not achieve the end proposed. If you want to compress it, a uniform impulse must be communicated to all the particles of the substance, so as to diminish the interval that separates them in an equal degree. If you wish to expand it, we should try to bring a uniform eccentric force to bear on every molecule; for unless we conform accurately to this law, we shall have breaches in continuity. The modes of motion, sir, are infinite, and no limit exists to combinations of movement. Upon what effect have you determined?"

"I want any kind of pressure that is strong enough to expand the skin indefinitely," began Raphael, quite out of patience.

"Substance is finite," the mathematician put in, "and therefore will not admit of indefinite expansion, but pressure will necessarily increase the extent of surface at the expense of the thickness, which will be diminished until the point is reached when the material gives out——"

"Bring about that result, sir," Raphael cried, "and you will have earned millions."

"Then I should rob you of your money," replied the other, phlegmatic as a Dutchman. "I am going to show you, in a word or two, that a machine can be made that is fit to crush Providence itself in pieces like a fly. It would reduce a man to the conditions of a piece of waste paper; a man—boots and spurs, hat and cravat, trinkets and gold, and all——"

"What a fearful machine!"

"Instead of flinging their brats into the water, the Chinese ought to make them useful in this way," the man of science went on, without reflecting on the regard man has for his progeny.

Quite absorbed by his idea, Planchette took an empty flower-pot, with a hole in the bottom, and put it on the surface of the dial, then he went to look for a little clay in a corner of the garden. Raphael stood spellbound, like a child to whom his nurse is telling some wonderful story. Planchette put the clay down upon the slab, drew a pruning-knife from his pocket, cut two branches from an elder tree, and began to clear them of pith by blowing through them, as if Raphael had not been present.

"There are the rudiments of the apparatus," he said. Then he connected one of the wooden pipes with the bottom of the flower-pot by a clay joint, in such a way that the mouth of the elder stem was just under the hole of the flower-pot; you might have compared it to a big tobacco-pipe. He spread a bed of clay over the surface of the slab, in a shovel-shaped mass, set down the flower-pot at the wider end of it, and laid the pipe of the elder stem along the portion which represented the handle of the shovel. Next he put a lump of clay at the end of the elder stem and therein planted the other pipe, in an upright position, forming a second elbow which connected it with the first horizontal pipe in such a manner that the air, or any given fluid in circulation, could flow through this improvised piece of mechanism from the mouth of the vertical tube, along the intermediate passages, and so into the large empty flower-pot.

"This apparatus, sir," he said to Raphael, with all the gravity of an academician pronouncing his initiatory discourse, "is one of the great Pascal's grandest claims upon our admiration."

"I don't understand."

The man of science smiled. He went up to a fruit-tree

and took down a little phial in which the druggist had sent him some liquid for catching ants; he broke off the bottom and made a funnel of the top, carefully fitting it to the mouth of the vertical hollowed stem that he had set in the clay, and at the opposite end to the great reservoir, represented by the flower-pot. Next, by means of a watering-pot, he poured in sufficient water to rise to the same level in the large vessel and in the tiny circular funnel at the end of the elder stem.

Raphael was thinking of his piece of skin.

"Water is considered to-day, sir, to be an incompressible body," said the mechanician; "never lose sight of that fundamental principle; still it can be compressed, though only so very slightly that we should regard its faculty for contracting as a zero. You see the amount of surface presented by the water at the brim of the flower-pot?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good; now suppose that that surface is a thousand times larger than the orifice of the elder stem through which I poured the liquid. Here, I am taking the funnel away——"

"Granted."

"Well, then, if by any method whatever I increase the volume of that quantity of water by pouring in yet more through the mouth of the little tube; the water thus compelled to flow downwards would rise in the reservoir, represented by the flower-pot, until it reached the same level at either end."

"That is quite clear," cried Raphael.

"But there is this difference," the other went on. "Suppose that the thin column of water poured into the little vertical tube there exerts a force equal, say, to a pound weight, for instance, its action will be punctually communicated to the great body of the liquid, and will be transmitted to every part of the surface represented by the water in the flower-pot so that at the surface there will be a thousand columns of water, every one pressing upwards as

if they were impelled by a force equal to that which compels the liquid to descend in the vertical tube; and of necessity they reproduce here," said Planchette, indicating to Raphael the top of the flower-pot, "the force introduced over there, a thousand-fold," and the man of science pointed out to the marquis the upright wooden pipe set in the clay.

"That is quite simple," said Raphael.

Planchette smiled again.

"In other words," he went on, with the mathematician's natural stubborn propensity for logic, "in order to resist the force of the incoming water, it would be necessary to exert, upon every part of the large surface, a force equal to that brought into action in the vertical column, but with this difference—if the column of liquid is a foot in height, the thousand little columns of the wide surface will only have a very slight elevating power.

"Now," said Planchette, as he gave a fillip to his bits of stick, "let us replace this funny little apparatus by steel tubes of suitable strength and dimensions; and if you cover the liquid surface of the reservoir with a strong sliding plate of metal, and if to this metal plate you oppose another, solid enough and strong enough to resist any test; if, furthermore, you give me the power of continually adding water to the volume of liquid contents by means of the little vertical tube, the object fixed between the two solid metal plates must of necessity yield to the tremendous crushing force which indefinitely compresses it. The method of continually pouring in water through a little tube, like the manner of communicating force through the volume of the liquid to a small metal plate, is an absurdly primitive mechanical device. A brace of piston and a few valves would do it all. Do you perceive, my dear sir," he said, taking Valentin by the arm, "there is scarcely a substance in existence that would not be compelled to dilate when fixed in between these two indefinitely resisting surfaces?"

"What! the author of the *Lettres provinciales* invented it?" Raphael exclaimed.

"He and no other, sir. The science of mechanics knows no simpler nor more beautiful contrivance. The opposite principle, the capacity of expansion possessed by water, has brought the steam-engine into being. But water will only expand up to a certain point, while its incompressibility, being a force in a manner negative, is, of necessity, infinite."

"If this skin is expanded," said Raphael, "I promise you to erect a colossal statue to Blaise Pascal; to found a prize of a hundred thousand francs to be offered every ten years for the solution of the grandest problem of mechanical science effected during the interval; to find dowries for all your cousins and second cousins, and finally to build an asylum on purpose for impoverished or insane mathematicians."

"That would be exceedingly useful," Planchette replied. "We will go to Spieghalter to-morrow, sir," he continued, with the serenity of a man living on a plane wholly intellectual. "That distinguished mechanic has just completed, after my own designs, an improved mechanical arrangement by which a child could get a thousand trusses of hay inside his cap."

"Then good-bye till to-morrow."

"Till to-morrow, sir."

"Talk of mechanics!" cried Raphael; "isn't it the greatest of the sciences? The other fellow with his onagers, classifications, ducks, and species, and his phials full of bottled monstrosities, is at best only fit for a billiard-marker in a saloon."

The next morning Raphael went off in great spirits to find Planchette, and together they set out for the Rue de la Santé—auspicious appellation! Arrived at Spieghalter's, the young man found himself in a vast foundry; his eyes lighted upon a multitude of glowing and roaring furnaces. There was a storm of sparks, a deluge of nails, an ocean of pistons, vices, levers, valves, girders, files, and nuts; a sea of melted metal, balks of timber and bar-steel. Iron filings

filled your throat. There was iron in the atmosphere; the men were covered with it; everything reeked of iron. The iron seemed to be a living organism; it became a fluid, moved, and seemed to shape itself intelligently after every fashion, to obey the worker's every caprice. Through the uproar made by the bellows, the crescendo of the falling hammers, and the shrill sounds of the lathes that drew groans from the steel, Raphael passed into a large, clean, and airy place where he was able to inspect at his leisure the great press that Planchette had told him about. He admired the cast-iron beams, as one might call them, and the twin bars of steel coupled together with indestructible bolts.

"If you were to give seven rapid turns to that crank," said Spieghalter, pointing out a beam of polished steel, "you would make a steel bar spurt out in thousands of jets, that would get into your legs like needles."

"The deuce!" exclaimed Raphael.

Planchette himself slipped the piece of skin between the metal plates of the all-powerful press; and, brimful of the certainty of a scientific conviction, he worked the crank energetically.

"Lie flat, all of you; we are dead men!" thundered Spieghalter, as he himself fell prone on the floor.

A hideous shrieking sound rang through the workshops. The water in the machine had broken the chamber, and now spouted out in a jet of incalculable force; luckily it went in the direction of an old furnace, which was overthrown, knocked to pieces, and twisted like a house that has been enveloped and carried away by a waterspout.

"Ha!" remarked Planchette serenely, "the piece of skin is as safe and sound as my eye. There was a flaw in your reservoir somewhere, or a crevice in the large tube——"

"No, no; I know my reservoir. The devil is in your contrivance, sir; you can take it away," and the German pounced upon a smith's hammer, flung the skin down on an anvil, and, with all the strength that rage gives, dealt the talisman the most formidable blow that had ever resounded through his workshops.

"There is not so much as a mark on it!" said Planchette, stroking the perverse bit of skin.

The workmen hurried in. The foreman took the skin and buried it in the glowing coal of a forge, while, in a semicircle round the fire, they all awaited the action of a huge pair of bellows. Raphael, Spieghalter, and Professor Planchette stood in the midst of the grimy expectant crowd. Raphael, looking round on faces dusted over with iron filings, white eyes, greasy blackened clothing, and hairy chests, could have fancied himself transported into the wild nocturnal world of German ballad poetry. After the skin had been in the fire for ten minutes, the foreman pulled it out with a pair of pincers.

"Hand it over to me," said Raphael.

The foreman held it out by way of a joke. The Marquis readily handled it; it was cool and flexible between his fingers. An exclamation of alarm went up; the workmen fled in terror. Valentin was left alone with Planchette in the empty workshop.

"There is certainly something infernal in the thing!" cried Raphael, in desperation. "Is no human power able to give me one day more of existence?"

"I made a mistake, sir," said the mathematician, with a penitent expression; "we ought to have subjected that peculiar skin to the action of a rolling machine. Where could my eyes have been when I suggested compression!"

"It was I that asked for it," Raphael answered.

The mathematician heaved a sigh of relief, like a culprit acquitted by a dozen jurors. Still, the strange problem afforded by the skin interested him; he meditated a moment, and then remarked:

"This unknown material ought to be treated chemically by re-agents. Let us call on Japhet—perhaps the chemist may have better luck than the mechanic."

Valentin urged his horse into a rapid trot, hoping to find the chemist, the celebrated Japhet, in his laboratory.

"Well, old friend," Planchette began, seeing Japhet in his armchair, examining a precipitate; "how goes chemistry?"

"Gone to sleep. Nothing new at all. The Académie, however, has recognized the existence of salicine, but salicine, asparagine, vauqueline, and digitaline are not really discoveries——"

"Since you cannot invent substances," said Raphael, "you are obliged to fall back on inventing names."

"Most emphatically true, young man."

"Here," said Planchette, addressing the chemist, "try to analyze this composition; if you can extract any element whatever from it, I christen it *diaboline* beforehand, for we have just smashed a hydraulic press in trying to compress it."

"Let's see! let's have a look at it!" cried the delighted chemist; "it may, perhaps, be a fresh element."

"It is simply a piece of the skin of an ass, sir," said Raphael.

"Sir!" said the illustrious chemist sternly.

"I am not joking," the Marquis answered, laying the piece of skin before him.

Baron Japhet applied the nervous fibres of his tongue to the skin; he had skill in thus detecting salts, acids, alkalis, and gases. After several experiments, he remarked:

"No taste whatever! Come, we will give it a little fluoric acid to drink."

Subjected to the influence of this ready solvent of animal tissue, the skin underwent no change whatsoever.

"It is not shagreen at all!" the chemist cried. "We will treat this unknown mystery as a mineral, and try its mettle by dropping it in a crucible where I have at this moment some red potash."

Japhet went out, and returned almost immediately.

"Allow me to cut away a bit of this strange substance, sir," he said to Raphael; "it is so extraordinary——"

"A bit!" exclaimed Raphael; "not so much as a hair's-breadth. You may try, though," he added, half banteringly, half sadly.

The chemist broke a razor in his desire to cut the skin;

he tried to break it by a powerful electric shock; next he submitted it to the influence of a galvanic battery; but all the thunderbolts his science wotted of fell harmless on the dreadful talisman.

It was seven o'clock in the evening. Planchette, Japhet, and Raphael, unaware of the flight of time, were awaiting the outcome of a final experiment. The Magic Skin emerged triumphant from a formidable encounter in which it had been engaged with a considerable quantity of chloride of nitrogen.

"It is all over with me," Raphael wailed. "It is the finger of God! I shall die!——" and he left the two amazed scientific men.

"We must be very careful not to talk about this affair at the Académie; our colleagues there would laugh at us," Planchette remarked to the chemist, after a long pause, in which they looked at each other without daring to communicate their thoughts. The learned pair looked like two Christians who had issued from their tombs to find no God in the heavens. Science had been powerless; acids, so much clear water; red potash had been discredited; the galvanic battery and electric shock had been a couple of playthings.

"A hydraulic press broken like a biscuit!" commented Planchette.

"I believe in the devil," said the Baron Japhet, after a moment's silence.

"And I in God," replied Planchette.

Each spoke in character. The universe for a mechanician is a machine that requires an operator; for chemistry—that fiendish employment of decomposing all things—the world is a gas endowed with the power of movement.

"We cannot deny the fact," the chemist replied.

"Pshaw! those gentlemen the doctrinaires have invented a nebulous aphorism for our consolation—Stupid as a fact."

"Your aphorism," said the chemist, "seems to me as a fact very stupid."

They began to laugh, and went off to dine like folk for whom a miracle is nothing more than a phenomenon.

Valentin reached his own house shivering with rage and consumed with anger. He had no more faith in anything. Conflicting thoughts shifted and surged to and fro in his brain, as is the case with every man brought face to face with an inconceivable fact. He had readily believed in some hidden flaw in Spieghalter's apparatus; he had not been surprised by the incompetence and failure of science and of fire; but the flexibility of the skin as he handled it, taken with its stubbornness when all the means of destruction that man possesses had been brought to bear upon it in vain—these things terrified him. The incontrovertible fact made him dizzy.

"I am mad," he muttered. "I have had no food since the morning, and yet I am neither hungry nor thirsty, and there is a fire in my breast that burns me."

He put back the skin in the frame where it had been enclosed but lately, drew a line in red ink about the actual configuration of the talisman, and seated himself in his armchair.

"Eight o'clock already!" he exclaimed. "To-day has gone like a dream."

He leaned his elbow on the arm of the chair, propped his head with his left hand, and so remained, lost in secret dark reflections and consuming thoughts that men condemned to die bear away with them.

"O Pauline!" he cried. "Poor child! there are gulfs that love can never traverse, despite the strength of his wings."

Just then he very distinctly heard a smothered sigh, and knew by one of the most tender privileges of passionate love that it was Pauline's breathing.

"That is my death warrant," he said to himself. "If she were there, I should wish to die in her arms."

A burst of gleeful and hearty laughter made him turn his face towards the bed; he saw Pauline's face through the transparent curtains, smiling like a child for gladness over

a successful piece of mischief. Her pretty hair fell over her shoulders in countless curls; she looked like a Bengal rose upon a pile of white roses.

"I cajoled Jonathan," said she. "Doesn't the bed belong to me, to me who am your wife? Don't scold me, darling; I only wanted to surprise you, to sleep beside you. Forgive me for my freak."

She sprang out of bed like a kitten, showed herself gleaming in her lawn raiment, and sat down on Raphael's knee.

"Love, what gulf were you talking about?" she said, with an anxious expression apparent upon her face.

"Death."

"You hurt me," she answered. "There are some thoughts upon which we, poor women that we are, cannot dwell; they are death to us. Is it strength of love in us, or lack of courage? I cannot tell. Death does not frighten me," she began again, laughingly. "To die with you, both together, to-morrow morning, in one last embrace, would be joy. It seems to me that even then I should have lived more than a hundred years. What does the number of days matter if we have spent a whole lifetime of peace and love in one night, in one hour?"

"You are right; Heaven is speaking through that pretty mouth of yours. Grant that I may kiss you, and let us die," said Raphael.

"Then let us die," she said, laughing.

Towards nine o'clock in the morning the daylight streamed through the chinks of the window shutters. Obscured somewhat by the muslin curtains, it yet sufficed to show clearly the rich colors of the carpet, the silks and furniture of the room, where the two lovers were lying asleep. The gilding sparkled here and there. A ray of sunlight fell and faded upon the soft down quilt that the freaks of love had thrown to the ground. The outlines of Pauline's dress, hanging from a cheval glass, appeared like a shadowy ghost. Her dainty shoes had been left at a distance from the bed. A nightingale came to perch upon the sill; its trills repeated over again, and

the sounds of its wings suddenly shaken out for flight, awoke Raphael.

"For me to die," he said, following out a thought begun in his dream, "my organization, the mechanism of flesh and bone, that is quickened by the will in me, and makes of me an individual *man,* must display some perceptible disease. Doctors ought to understand the symptoms of any attack on vitality, and could tell me whether I am sick or sound."

He gazed at his sleeping wife. She had stretched her head out to him, expressing in this way even while she slept the anxious tenderness of love. Pauline seemed to look at him as she lay with her face turned towards him in an attitude as full of grace as a young child's, with her pretty, half-opened mouth held out towards him, as she drew her light, even breath. Her little pearly teeth seemed to heighten the redness of the fresh lips with the smile hovering over them. The red glow in her complexion was brighter, and its whiteness was, so to speak, whiter still just then than in the most impassioned moments of the waking day. In her unconstrained grace, as she lay, so full of believing trust, the adorable attractions of childhood were added to the enchantments of love.

Even the most unaffected women still obey certain social conventions, which restrain the free expansion of the soul within them during their waking hours; but slumber seems to give them back the spontaneity of life which makes infancy lovely. Pauline blushed for nothing; she was like one of those beloved and heavenly beings, in whom reason has not yet put motives into their actions and mystery into their glances. Her profile stood out in sharp relief against the fine cambric of the pillows; there was a certain sprightliness about her loose hair in confusion, mingled with the deep lace ruffles; but she was sleeping in happiness, her long lashes were tightly pressed against her cheeks, as if to secure her eyes from too strong a light, or to aid an effort of her soul to recollect and to hold fast a bliss that had been perfect but fleeting. Her tiny pink and white ear, framed by a lock of her hair and outlined by a wrapping of Mechlin lace, would have made an artist, a

painter, an old man, wildly in love, and would perhaps have restored a madman to his senses.

Is it not an ineffable bliss to behold the woman that you love, sleeping, smiling in a peaceful dream beneath your protection, loving you even in dreams, even at the point where the individual seems to cease to exist, offering to you yet the mute lips that speak to you in slumber of the latest kiss? Is it not indescribable happiness to see a trusting woman, half-clad, but wrapped round in her love as by a cloak—modesty in the midst of dishevelment—to see admiringly her scattered clothing, the silken stocking hastily put off to please you last evening, the unclasped girdle that implies a boundless faith in you. A whole romance lies there in that girdle; the woman that it used to protect exists no longer; she is yours, she has become *you;* henceforward any betrayal of her is a blow dealt at yourself.

In this softened mood Raphael's eyes wandered over the room, now filled with memories and love, and where the very daylight seemed to take delightful hues. Then he turned his gaze at last upon the outlines of the woman's form, upon youth and purity, and love that even now had no thought that was not for him alone, above all things, and longed to live for ever. As his eyes fell upon Pauline, her own opened at once as if a ray of sunlight had lighted on them.

"Good-morning," she said, smiling. "How handsome you are, bad man!"

The grace of love and youth, of silence and dawn, shone in their faces, making a divine picture, with the fleeting spell over it all that belongs only to the earliest days of passion, just as simplicity and artlessness are the peculiar possession of childhood. Alas! love's springtide joys, like our own youthful laughter, must even take flight, and live for us no longer save in memory; either for our despair, or to shed some soothing fragrance over us, according to the bent of our inmost thoughts.

"What made me wake you?" said Raphael. "It was so great

a pleasure to watch you sleeping that it brought tears to my eyes."

"And to mine, too," she answered. "I cried in the night while I watched you sleeping, but not with happiness. Raphael, dear, pray listen to me. Your breathing is labored while you sleep, and something rattles in your chest that frightens me. You have a little dry cough when you are asleep, exactly like my father's, who is dying of phthisis. In those sounds from your lungs I recognized some of the peculiar symptoms of that complaint. Then you are feverish; I know you are; your hand was moist and burning—— Darling, you are young," she added with a shudder, "and you could still get over it if unfortunately—— But, no," she cried cheerfully, "there is no 'unfortunately,' the disease is contagious, so the doctors say."

She flung both arms about Raphael, drawing in his breath through one of those kisses in which the soul reaches its end.

"I do not wish to live to old age," she said. "Let us both die young, and go to heaven while flowers fill our hands."

"We always make such designs as those when we are well and strong," Raphael replied, burying his hands in Pauline's hair. But even then a horrible fit of coughing came on, one of those deep ominous coughs that seem to come from the depths of the tomb, a cough that leaves the sufferer ghastly pale, trembling, and perspiring; with aching sides and quivering nerves, with a feeling of weariness pervading the very marrow of the spine, and unspeakable languor in every vein. Raphael slowly laid himself down, pale, exhausted, and overcome, like a man who has spent all the strength in him over one final effort. Pauline's eyes, grown large with terror, were fixed upon him; she lay quite motionless, pale, and silent.

"Let us commit no more follies, my angel," she said, trying not to let Raphael see the dreadful forebodings that disturbed her. She covered her face with her hands, for she saw Death before her—the hideous skeleton. Raphael's face had grown as pale and livid as any skull unearthed from a churchyard to assist the studies of some scientific man. Pauline remem-

bered the exclamation that had escaped from Valentin the previous evening, and to herself she said:

"Yes, there are gulfs that love can never cross, and therein love must bury itself."

On a March morning, some days after this wretched scene, Raphael found himself seated in an armchair, placed in the window in the full light of day. Four doctors stood round him, each in turn trying his pulse, feeling him over, and questioning him with apparent interest. The invalid sought to guess their thoughts, putting a construction on every movement they made, and on the slightest contractions of their brows. His last hope lay in this consultation. This court of appeal was about to pronounce its decision—life or death.

Valentin had summoned the oracles of modern medicine, so that he might have the last word of science. Thanks to his wealth and title, there stood before him three embodied theories; human knowledge fluctuated round the three points. Three of the doctors brought among them the complete circle of medical philosophy; they represented the points of conflict round which the battle raged, between Spiritualism, Analysis, and goodness knows what in the way of mocking eclecticism.

The fourth doctor was Horace Bianchon, a man of science with a future before him, the most distinguished man of the new school in medicine, a discreet and unassuming representative of a studious generation that is preparing to receive the inheritance of fifty years of experience treasured up by the École de Paris, a generation that perhaps will erect the monument for the building of which the centuries behind us have collected the different materials. As a personal friend of the Marquis and of Rastignac, he had been in attendance on the former for some days past, and was helping him to answer the inquiries of the three professors, occasionally insisting somewhat upon those symptoms which, in his opinion, pointed to pulmonary disease.

"You have been living at a great pace, leading a dissipated life, no doubt, and you have devoted yourself largely to intellectual work?" queried one of the three celebrated authorities,

addressing Raphael. He was a square-headed man, with a large frame and energetic organization, which seemed to mark him out as superior to his two rivals.

"I made up my mind to kill myself with debauchery, after spending three years over an extensive work, with which perhaps you may some day occupy yourselves," Raphael replied.

The great doctor shook his head, and so displayed his satisfaction. "I was sure of it," he seemed to say to himself. He was the illustrious Brisset, the successor of Cabanis and Bichat, head of the Organic School, a doctor popular with believers in material and positive science, who see in man a complete individual, subject solely to the laws of his own particular organization; and who consider that his normal condition and abnormal states of disease can both be traced to obvious causes.

After this reply, Brisset looked, without speaking, at a middle-sized person, whose darkly flushed countenance and glowing eyes seemed to belong to some antique satyr; and who, leaning his back against the corner of the embrasure, was studying Raphael, without saying a word. Doctor Caméristus, a man of creeds and enthusiasms, the head of the "Vitalists," a romantic champion of the esoteric doctrines of Van Helmont, discerned a lofty informing principle in human life, a mysterious and inexplicable phenomenon which mocks at the scalpel, deceives the surgeon, eludes the drugs of the pharmacopœia, the formulæ of algebra, the demonstrations of anatomy, and derides all our efforts; a sort of invisible, intangible flame, which, obeying some divinely appointed law, will often linger on in a body in our opinion devoted to death, while it takes flight from an organization well fitted for prolonged existence.

A bitter smile hovered upon the lips of the third doctor, Maugredie, a man of acknowledged ability, but a Pyrrhonist and a scoffer, with the scalpel for his one article of faith. He would consider, as a concession to Brisset, that a man who, as a matter of fact, was perfectly well was dead, and recognize with Caméristus that a man might be living on

after his apparent demise. He found something sensible in every theory, and embraced none of them, claiming that the best of all systems of medicine was to have none at all, and to stick to facts. This Panurge of the Clinical Schools, the king of observers, the great investigator, great sceptic, the man of desperate expedients, was scrutinizing the Magic Skin.

"I should very much like to be a witness of the coincidence of its retrenchment with your wish," he said to the Marquis.

"Where is the use?" cried Brisset.

"Where is the use?" echoed Caméristus.

"Ah, you are both of the same mind," replied Maugredie.

"The contraction is perfectly simple," Brisset went on.

"It is supernatural," remarked Caméristus.

"In short," Maugredie made answer, with affected solemnity, and handing the piece of skin to Raphael as he spoke, "the shriveling faculty of the skin is a fact inexplicable, and yet quite natural, which, ever since the world began, has been the despair of medicine and of pretty women."

All Valentin's observation could discover no trace of a feeling for his troubles in any of the three doctors. The three received every answer in silence, scanned him unconcernedly, and interrogated him unsympathetically. Politeness did not conceal their indifference; whether deliberation or certainty was the cause, their words at any rate came so seldom and so languidly, that at times Raphael thought that their attention was wandering. From time to time Brisset, the sole speaker, remarked, "Good! just so!" as Bianchon pointed out the existence of each desperate symptom. Caméristus seemed to be deep in meditation; Maugredie looked like a comic author, studying two queer characters with a view to reproducing them faithfully upon the stage. There was deep, unconcealed distress, and grave compassion in Horace Bianchon's face. He had been a doctor for too short a time to be untouched by suffering and unmoved by a deathbed; he had not learned to keep back the sympathetic tears that obscure a man's clear vision and prevent him from seizing, like the general of an army, upon the auspicious moment for victory, in utter disregard of the groans of dying men.

After spending about half an hour over taking in some sort the measure of the patient and the complaint, much as a tailor measures a young man for a coat when he orders his wedding outfit, the authorities uttered several commonplaces, and even talked of politics. Then they decided to go into Raphael's study to exchange their ideas and frame their verdict.

"May I not be present during the discussion, gentlemen?" Valentin had asked them, but Brisset and Maugredie protested against this, and, in spite of their patient's entreaties, declined altogether to deliberate in his presence.

Raphael gave way before their custom, thinking that he could slip into a passage adjoining, whence he could easily overhear the medical conference in which the three professors were about to engage.

"Permit me, gentlemen," said Brisset, as they entered, "to give you my own opinion at once. I neither wish to force it upon you nor to have it discussed. In the first place, it is unbiased, concise, and based on an exact similarity that exists between one of my own patients and the subject that we have been called in to examine; and, moreover, I am expected at my hospital. The importance of the case that demands my presence there will excuse me for speaking the first word. The subject with which we are concerned has been exhausted in an equal degree by intellectual labors—what did he set about, Horace?" he asked of the young doctor.

"A 'Theory of the Will.' "

"The devil! but that's a big subject. He is exhausted, I say, by too much brain-work, by irregular courses, and by the repeated use of too powerful stimulants. Violent exertion of body and mind has demoralized the whole system. It is easy, gentlemen, to recognize in the symptoms of the face and body generally intense irritation of the stomach, an affection of the great sympathetic nerve, acute sensibility of the epigastric region, and contraction of the right and left hypochondriac. You have noticed, too, the large size and prominence of the liver. M. Bianchon has, besides, con-

stantly watched the patient, and he tells us that digestion is troublesome and difficult. Strictly speaking, there is no stomach left, and so the man has disappeared. The brain is atrophied because the man digests no longer. The progressive deterioration wrought in the epigastric region, the seat of vitality, has vitiated the whole system. Thence, by continuous fevered vibrations, the disorder has reached the brain by means of the nervous plexus, hence the excessive irritation in that organ. There is monomania. The patient is burdened with a fixed idea. That piece of skin really contracts, to his way of thinking; very likely it always has been as we have seen it; but whether it contracts or no, that thing is for him just like the fly that some Grand Vizier or other had on his nose. If you put leeches at once on the epigastrium, and reduce the irritation in that part, which is the very seat of man's life, and if you diet the patient, the monomania will leave him. I will say no more to Dr. Bianchon; he should be able to grasp the whole treatment as well as the details. There may be, perhaps, some complication of the disease—the bronchial tubes, possibly, may be also inflamed; but, I believe, that treatment for the intestinal organs is very much more important and necessary, and more urgently required than for the lungs. Persistent study of abstract matters, and certain violent passions, have induced serious disorders in that vital mechanism. However, we are in time to set these conditions right. Nothing it too seriously affected. You will easily get your friend round again," he remarked to Bianchon.

"Our learned colleague is taking the effect for the cause," Caméristus replied. "Yes, the changes that he has observed so keenly certainly exist in the patient; but it is not the stomach that, by degrees, has set up nervous action in the system, and so affected the brain, like a hole in a window pane spreading cracks round about it. It took a blow of some kind to make a hole in the window; who gave the blow? Do we know that? Have we investigated the patient's case sufficiently? Are we acquainted with all the events of his life?

"The vital principle, gentlemen," he continued, "the Archeus of Van Helmont, is affected in his case—the very essence and centre of life is attacked. The divine spark, the transitory intelligence which holds the organism together, which is the source of the will, the inspiration of life, has ceased to regulate the daily phenomena of the mechanism and the functions of every organ; thence arise all the complications which my learned colleague has so thoroughly appreciated. The epigastric region does not affect the brain, but the brain affects the epigastric region. No," he went on, vigorously slapping his chest, "no, I am not a stomach in the form of a man. No, everything does not lie there. I do not feel that I have the courage to say that if the epigastric region is in good order, everything else is in a like condition——

"We cannot trace," he went on more mildly, "to one physical cause the serious disturbances that supervene in this or that subject which has been dangerously attacked, nor submit them to a uniform treatment. No one man is like another. We have each peculiar organs, differently affected, diversely nourished, adapted to perform different functions, and to induce a condition necessary to the accomplishment of an order of things which is unknown to us. The sublime will has so wrought that a little portion of the great All is set within us to sustain the phenomena of living; in every man it formulates itself distinctly, making each, to all appearance, a separate individual, yet in one point co-existent with the infinite cause. So we ought to make a separate study of each subject, discover all about it, find out in what its life consists, and wherein its power lies. From the softness of a wet sponge to the hardness of pumice-stone there are infinite fine degrees of difference. Man is just like that. Between the sponge-like organizations of the lymphatic and the vigorous iron muscles of such men as are destined for a long life, what a margin for errors for the single inflexible system of a lowering treatment to commit; a system that reduces the capacities of the human frame, which you always conclude

have been over-excited. Let us look for the origin of the disease in the mental and not in the physical viscera. A doctor is an inspired being, endowed by God with a special gift—the power to read the secrets of vitality; just as the prophet has received the eyes that foresee the future, the poet his faculty of evoking nature, and the musician the power of arranging sounds in an harmonious order that is possibly a copy of an ideal harmony on high."

"There is his everlasting system of medicine, arbitrary, monarchical, and pious," muttered Brisset.

"Gentlemen," Maugredie broke in hastily, to distract attention from Brisset's comment, "don't let us lose sight of the patient."

"What is the good of science?" Raphael moaned. "Here is my recovery halting between a string of beads and a rosary of leeches, between Dupuytren's bistoury and Prince Hohenlohe's prayer. There is Maugredie suspending his judgment on the line that divides facts from words, mind from matters. Man's 'it is,' and 'it is not,' is always on my track; it is the *Carymary Carymara* of Rabelais for evermore: my disorder is spiritual, *Carymary,* or material, *Carymara.* Shall I live? They have no idea. Planchette was more straightforward with me, at any rate, when he said, 'I do not know.' "

Just then Valentin heard Maugredie's voice.

"The patient suffers from monomania; very good, I am quite of that opinion," he said, "but he has two hundred thousand a year; monomaniacs of that kind are very uncommon. As for knowing whether his epigastric region has affected his brain, or his brain his epigastric region, we shall find that out, perhaps, whenever he dies. But to resume. There is no disputing the fact that he is ill; some sort of treatment he must have. Let us leave theories alone, and put leeches on him, to counteract the nervous and intestinal irritation, as to the existence of which we all agree; and let us send him to drink the waters, in that way we shall act on both systems at once. If there really is tubercular disease, we can hardly expect to save his life; so that——"

Raphael abruptly left the passage, and went back to his armchair. The four doctors very soon came out of the study; Horace was the spokesman.

"These gentlemen," he told him, "have unanimously agreed that leeches must be applied to the stomach at once, and that both physical and moral treatment are imperatively needed. In the first place, a carefully prescribed rule of diet, so as to soothe the internal irritation"—here Brisset signified his approval; "and in the second, a hygienic regimen, to set your general condition right. We all, therefore, recommend you to go to take the waters at Aix in Savoy; or, if you like it better, at Mont Dore in Auvergne; the air and the situation are both pleasanter in Savoy than in the Cantal, but you will consult your own taste."

Here it was Caméristus who nodded assent.

"These gentlemen," Bianchon continued, "having recognized a slight affection of the respiratory organs, are agreed as to the utility of the previous course of treatment that I have prescribed. They think that there will be no difficulty about restoring you to health, and that everything depends upon a wise and alternate employment of these various means. And——"

"And that is the cause of the milk in the cocoanut," said Raphael, with a smile, as he led Horace into his study to pay the fees for this useless consultation.

"Their conclusions are logical," the young doctor replied. "Caméristus feels, Brisset examines, Maugredie doubts. Has not man a soul, a body, and an intelligence? One of these three elemental constituents always influences us more or less strongly; there will always be the personal element in human science. Believe me, Raphael, we effect no cures; we only assist them. Another system—the use of mild remedies while Nature exerts her powers—lies between the extremes of theory of Brisset and Caméristus, but one ought to have known the patient for some ten years or so to obtain a good result on these lines. Negation lies at the back of all medicine, as in every other science. So endeavor to live wholesomely; try a

trip to Savoy; the best course is, and always will be, to trust to Nature."

It was a month later, on a fine summer-like evening, that several people, who were taking the waters at Aix, returned from the promenade and met together in the salons of the Club. Raphael remained alone by a window for a long time. His back was turned upon the gathering, and he himself was deep in those involuntary musings in which thoughts arise in succession and fade away, shaping themselves indistinctly, passing over us like thin, almost colorless clouds. Melancholy is sweet to us then, and delight is shadowy, for the soul is half asleep. Valentin gave himself up to this life of sensations; he was steeping himself in the warm, soft twilight, enjoying the pure air with the scent of the hills in it, happy in that he felt no pain, and had tranquilized his threatening Magic Skin at last. It grew cooler as the red glow of the sunset faded on the mountain peaks; he shut the window and left his place.

"Will you be so kind as not to close the windows, sir?" said an old lady; "we are being stifled——"

The peculiarly sharp and jarring tones in which the phrase was uttered grated on Raphael's ears; it fell on them like an indiscreet remark let slip by some man in whose friendship we would fain believe, a word which reveals unsuspected depths of selfishness and destroys some pleasing sentimental illusion of ours. The Marquis glanced, with the cool inscrutable expression of a diplomatist, at the old lady, called a servant, and, when he came, curtly bade him

"Open that window."

Great surprise was clearly expressed on all faces at the words. The whole roomful began to whisper to each other, and turned their eyes upon the invalid, as though he had given some serious offence. Raphael, who had never quite managed to rid himself of the bashfulness of his early youth, felt a momentary confusion; then he shook off his torpor, exerted his faculties, and asked himself the meaning of this strange scene.

A sudden and rapid impulse quickened his brain; the past weeks appeared before him in a clear and definite vision; the reasons for the feelings he inspired in others stood out for him in relief, like the veins of some corpse which a naturalist, by some cunningly contrived injection, has colored so as to show their least ramifications.

He discerned himself in this fleeting picture; he followed out his own life in it, thought by thought, day after day. He saw himself, not without astonishment, an absent gloomy figure in the midst of these lively folk, always musing over his own fate, always absorbed by his own sufferings, seemingly impatient of the most harmless chat. He saw how he had shunned the ephemeral intimacies that travelers are so ready to establish—no doubt because they feel sure of never meeting each other again—and how he had taken little heed of those about him. He saw himself like the rocks without, unmoved by the caresses or the stormy surgings of the waves.

Then, by a gift of insight seldom accorded, he read the thoughts of all those about him. The light of a candle revealed the sardonic profile and yellow cranium of an old man; he remembered now that he had won from him, and had never proposed that the other should have his revenge; a little further on he saw a pretty woman, whose lively advances he had met with frigid coolness; there was not a face there that did not reproach him with some wrong done, inexplicably to all appearance, but the real offence in every case lay in some mortification, some invisible hurt dealt to self-love. He had unintentionally jarred on all the small susceptibilities of the circle round about him.

His guests on various occasions, and those to whom he had lent his horses, had taken offence at his luxurious ways; their ungraciousness had been a surprise to him; he had spared them further humiliations of that kind, and they had considered that he looked down upon them, and had accused him of haughtiness ever since. He could read their inmost thoughts as he fathomed their natures in this way. Society

with its polish and varnish grew loathsome to him. He was envied and hated for his wealth and superior ability; his reserve baffled the inquisitive; his humility seemed like haughtiness to these petty superficial natures. He guessed the secret unpardonable crime which he had committed against them; he had overstepped the limits of the jurisdiction of their mediocrity. He had resisted their inquisitorial tyranny; he could dispense with their society; and all of them, therefore, had instinctively combined to make him feel their power, and to take revenge upon this incipient royalty by submitting him to a kind of ostracism, and so teaching him that they in their turn could do without him.

Pity came over him, first of all, at this aspect of mankind, but very soon he shuddered at the thought of the power that came thus, at will, and flung aside for him the veil of flesh under which the moral nature is hidden away. He closed his eyes, so as to see no more. A black curtain was drawn all at once over this unlucky phantom show of truth; but still he found himself in the terrible loneliness that surrounds every power and dominion. Just then a violent fit of coughing seized him. Far from receiving one single word —indifferent, and meaningless, it is true, but still containing, among well-bred people brought together by chance, at least some pretence of civil commiseration—he now heard hostile ejaculations and muttered complaints. Society there assembled disdained any pantomime on his account, perhaps because he had gauged its real nature too well.

"His complaint is contagious."

"The president of the Club ought to forbid him to enter the salon."

"It is contrary to all rules and regulations to cough in that way!"

"When a man is as ill as that, he ought not to come to take the waters——"

"He will drive me away from the place."

Raphael rose and walked about the rooms to screen himself from their unanimous execrations. He thought to find

a shelter, and went up to a young lady who sat doing nothing, minded to address some pretty speeches to her; but as he came towards her, she turned her back upon him, and pretended to be watching the dancers. Raphael feared lest he might have made use of the talisman already that evening; and feeling that he had neither the wish nor the courage to break into the conversation, he left the salon and took refuge in the billiard-room. No one there greeted him, nobody spoke to him, no one sent so much as a friendly glance in his direction. His turn of mind, naturally meditative, had discovered instinctively the general grounds and reasons for the aversion he inspired. This little world was obeying, unconsciously perhaps, the sovereign law which rules over polite society; its inexorable nature was becoming apparent in its entirety to Raphael's eyes. A glance into the past showed it to him, as a type completely realized in Fœdora.

He would no more meet with sympathy here for his bodily ills than he had received it at her hands for the distress in his heart. The fashionable world expels every suffering creature from its midst, just as the body of a man in robust health rejects any germ of disease. The world holds suffering and misfortune in abhorrence; it dreads them like the plague; it never hesitates between vice and trouble, for vice is a luxury. Ill-fortune may possess a majesty of its own, but society can belittle it and make it ridiculous by an epigram. Society draws caricatures, and in this way flings in the teeth of fallen kings the affronts which it fancies it has received from them; society, like the Roman youth at the circus, never shows mercy to the fallen gladiator; mockery and money are its vital necessities. "Death to the weak!" That is the oath taken by this kind of Equestrian order, instituted in their midst by all the nations of the world; everywhere it makes for the elevation of the rich, and its motto is deeply graven in hearts that wealth has turned to stone, or that have been reared in aristocratic prejudices.

Assemble a collection of school-boys together. That will give you a society in miniature, a miniature which represents

life more truly, because it is so frank and artless; and in it you will always find poor isolated beings, relegated to some place in the general estimation between pity and contempt, on account of their weakness and suffering. To these the Evangel promises heaven hereafter. Go lower yet in the scale of organized creation. If some bird among its fellows in the courtyard sickens, the others fall upon it with their beaks, pluck out its feathers, and kill it. The whole world, in accordance with its charter of egotism, brings all its severity to bear upon wretchedness that has the hardihood to spoil its festivities, and to trouble its joys.

Any sufferer in mind or body, any helpless or poor man, is a pariah. He had better remain in his solitude; if he crosses the boundary-line, he will find winter everywhere; he will find freezing cold in other men's looks, manners, words, and hearts; and lucky indeed is he if he does not receive an insult where he expected that sympathy would be expended upon him. Let the dying keep to their bed of neglect, and age sit lonely by its fireside. Portionless maids, freeze and burn in your solitary attics. If the world tolerates misery of any kind, it is to turn it to account for its own purposes, to make some use of it, saddle and bridle it, put a bit in its mouth, ride it about, and get some fun out of it.

Crotchety spinsters, ladies' companions, put a cheerful face upon it, endure the humors of your so-called benefactress, carry her lapdogs for her; you have an English poodle for your rival, and you must seek to understand the moods of your patroness, and amuse her, and—keep silence about yourselves. As for you, unblushing parasite, uncrowned king of unliveried servants, leave your real character at home, let your digestion keep pace with your host's, laugh when he laughs, mingle your tears with his, and find his epigrams amusing; if you want to relieve your mind about him, wait till he is ruined. That is the way the world shows its respect for the unfortunate; it persecutes them, or slays them; it deprives them of their manhood, or humbles them in the dust.

Such thoughts as these welled up in Raphael's heart with

the suddenness of poetic inspiration. He looked around him, and felt the influence of the forbidding gloom that society breathes out in order to rid itself of the unfortunate; it nipped his soul more effectually than the east wind grips the body in December. He locked his arms over his chest, set his back against the wall, and fell into a deep melancholy. He mused upon the meagre happiness that this depressing way of living can give. What did it amount to? Amusement with no pleasure in it, gaiety without gladness, joyless festivity, fevered dreams empty of all delight, firewood or ashes on the hearth without a spark of flame in them. When he raised his head, he found himself alone, all the billiard players had gone.

"I have only to let them know my power to make them worship my coughing fits," he said to himself, and wrapped himself against the world in the cloak of his contempt.

Next day the resident doctor came to call upon him, and took an anxious interest in his health. Raphael felt a thrill of joy at the friendly words addressed to him. The doctor's face, to his thinking, wore an expression that was kind and pleasant; the pale curls of his wig seemed redolent of philanthropy; the square cut of his coat, the loose folds of his trousers, his big Quaker-like shoes, everything about him down to the powder shaken from his queue and dusted in a circle upon his slightly stooping shoulders, revealed an apostolic nature, and spoke of Christian charity and of the self-sacrifice of a man, who, out of sheer devotion to his patients, had compelled himself to learn to play whist and tric-trac so well that he never lost money to any of them.

"My Lord Marquis," said he, after a long talk with Raphael, "I can dispel your uneasiness beyond all doubt. I know your constitution well enough by this time to assure you that the doctors in Paris, whose great abilities I know, are mistaken as to the nature of your complaint. You can live as long as Methuselah, my Lord Marquis, accidents only excepted. Your lungs are as sound as a blacksmith's bellows, your stomach would put an ostrich to the blush; but if you persist

in living at a high altitude, you are running the risk of a prompt interment in consecrated soil. A few words, my Lord Marquis, will make my meaning clear to you.

"Chemistry," he began, "has shown us that man's breathing is a real process of combustion, and the intensity of its action varies according to the abundance or scarcity of the phlogistic element stored up by the organism of each individual. In your case, the phlogistic or inflammatory element is abundant; if you will permit me to put it so, you generate superfluous oxygen, possessing as you do the inflammatory temperament of a man destined to experience strong emotions. While you breathe the keen, pure air that stimulates life in men of lymphatic constitution, you are accelerating an expenditure of vitality already too rapid. One of the conditions of existence for you is the heavier atmosphere of the plains and valleys. Yes, the vital air for a man consumed by his genius lies in the fertile pasture-lands of Germany, at Toplitz or Baden-Baden. If England is not obnoxious to you, its misty climate would reduce your fever; but the situation of our baths, a thousand feet above the level of the Mediterranean, is dangerous for you. That is my opinion at least," he said, with a deprecatory gesture, "and I give it in opposition to our interests, for, if you act upon it, we shall unfortunately lose you."

But for these closing words of his, the affable doctor's seeming good-nature would have completely won Raphael over; but he was too profoundly observant not to understand the meaning of the tone, the look and gesture that accompanied that mild sarcasm, not to see that the little man had been sent on this errand, no doubt, by a flock of his rejoicing patients. The florid-looking idlers, tedious old women, nomad English people, and fine ladies who had given their husbands the slip, and were escorted hither by their lovers—oneand all were in a plot to drive away a wretched, feeble creature about to die, who seemed unable to hold out against a daily renewed persecution! Raphael accepted the challenge; he foresaw some amusement to be derived from their manœuvres.

"As you would be grieved at losing me," said he to the doctor, "I will endeavor to avail myself of your good advice without leaving the place. I will set about having a house built to-morrow, and the atmosphere within it shall be regulated by your instructions."

The doctor understood the sarcastic smile that lurked about Raphael's mouth, and took his leave without finding another word to say.

The Lake of Bourget lies seven hundred feet above the Mediterranean, in a great hollow among the jagged peaks of the hills; it sparkles there, the bluest drop of water in the world. From the summit of the Cat's Tooth the lake below looks like a stray turquoise. This lovely sheet of water is about twenty-seven miles round, and in some places is nearly five hundred feet deep.

Under the cloudless sky, in your boat in the midst of the great expanse of water, with only the sound of the oars in your ears, only the vague outline of the hills on the horizon before you; you admire the glittering snows of the French Maurienne; you pass, now by masses of granite clad in the velvet of green turf or in low-growing shrubs, now by pleasant sloping meadows; there is always a wilderness on the one hand and fertile lands on the other, and both harmonies and dissonances compose a scene for you where everything is at once small and vast, and you feel yourself to be a poor onlooker at a great banquet. The configuration of the mountains brings about misleading optical conditions and illusions of perspective; a pine-tree a hundred feet in height looks to be a mere weed; wide valleys look as narrow as meadow paths. The lake is the only one where the confidences of heart and heart can be exchanged. There one can love; there one can meditate. Nowhere on earth will you find a closer understanding between the water, the sky, the mountains, and the fields. There is a balm there for all the agitations of life. The place keeps the secrets of sorrow to itself, the sorrow that grows less beneath its soothing influence; and to love, it gives a grave and meditative cast,

deepening passion and purifying it. A kiss there becomes something great. But beyond all other things it is the lake for memories; it aids them by lending to them the hues of its own waves; it is a mirror in which everything is reflected. Only here, with this lovely landscape all around him, could Raphael endure the burden laid upon him; here he could remain as a languid dreamer, without a wish of his own.

He went out upon the lake after the doctor's visit, and was landed at a lonely point on the pleasant slope where the village of Saint-Innocent is situated. The view from this promontory, as one may call it, comprises the heights of Bugey with the Rhone flowing at their foot, and the end of the lake; but Raphael liked to look at the opposite shore from thence, at the melancholy looking Abbey of Haute-Combe, the burying-place of the Sardinian kings, who lie prostrate there before the hills, like pilgrims come at last to their journey's end. The silence of the landscape was broken by the even rhythm of the strokes of the oar; it seemed to find a voice for the place, in monotonous cadences like the chanting of monks. The Marquis was surprised to find visitors to this usually lonely part of the lake; and as he mused, he watched the people seated in the boat, and recognized in the stern the elderly lady who had spoken so harshly to him the evening before.

No one took any notice of Raphael as the boat passed, except the elderly lady's companion, a poor old maid of noble family, who bowed to him, and whom it seemed to him that he saw for the first time. A few seconds later he had already forgotten the visitors, who had rapidly disappeared behind the promontory, when he heard the fluttering of a dress and the sound of light footsteps not far from him. He turned about and saw the companion; and, guessing from her embarrassed manner that she wished to speak with him, he walked towards her.

She was somewhere about thirty-six years of age, thin and tall, reserved and prim, and, like all old maids, seemed

puzzled to know which way to look, an expression no longer in keeping with her measured, springless, and hesitating steps. She was both young and old at the same time, and, by a certain dignity in her carriage, showed the high value which she set upon her charms and perfections. In addition, her movements were all demure and discreet, like those of women who are accustomed to take great care of themselves, no doubt because they desire not to be cheated of love, their destined end.

"Your life is in danger, sir; do not come to the Club again!" she said, stepping back a pace or two from Raphael, as if her reputation had been already compromised.

"But, mademoiselle," said Raphael, smiling, "please explain yourself more clearly, since you have condescended so far——"

"Ah," she answered, "unless I had had a very strong motive, I should never have run the risk of offending the countess, for if she ever came to know that I had warned you——"

"And who would tell her, mademoiselle?" cried Raphael.

"True," the old maid answered. She looked at him, quaking like an owl out in the sunlight. "But think of yourself," she went on; "several young men, who want to drive you away from the baths, have agreed to pick a quarrel with you, and to force you into a duel."

The elderly lady's voice sounded in the distance.

"Mademoiselle," began the Marquis, "my gratitude——" But his protectress had fled already; she had heard the voice of her mistress squeaking afresh among the rocks.

"Poor girl! unhappiness always understands and helps the unhappy," Raphael thought, and sat himself down at the foot of a tree.

The key of every science is, beyond cavil, the mark of interrogation; we owe most of our greatest discoveries to a *Why?* and all the wisdom in the world, perhaps, consists in asking *Wherefore?* in every connection. But, on the other hand, this acquired prescience is the ruin of our illusions.

So Valentin, having taken the old maid's kindly action for the text of his wandering thoughts, without the deliberate promptings of philosophy, must find it full of gall and wormwood.

"It is not at all extraordinary that a gentlewoman's gentlewoman should take a fancy to me," said he to himself. "I am twenty-seven years old, and I have a title and an income of two hundred thousand a year. But that her mistress, who hates water like a rabid cat—for it would be hard to give the palm to either in that matter—that her mistress should have brought her here in a boat! Is not that very strange and wonderful? Those two women came into Savoy to sleep like marmots; they ask if day has dawned at noon; and to think that they could get up this morning before eight o'clock, to take their chance in running after me!"

Very soon the old maid and her elderly innocence became, in his eyes, a fresh manifestation of that artificial, malicious little world. It was a paltry device, a clumsy artifice, a piece of priest's or woman's craft. Was the duel a myth, or did they merely want to frighten him? But these petty creatures, impudent and teasing as flies, had succeeded in wounding his vanity, in rousing his pride, and exciting his curiosity. Unwilling to become their dupe, or to be taken for a coward, and even diverted perhaps by the little drama, he went to the Club that very evening.

He stood leaning against the marble chimney-piece, and stayed there quietly in the middle of the principal saloon, doing his best to give no one any advantage over him; but he scrutinized the faces about him, and gave a certain vague offence to those assembled, by his inspection. Like a dog aware of his strength, he awaited the contest on his own ground, without unnecessary barking. Towards the end of the evening he strolled into the cardroom, walking between the door and another that opened into the billiard-room, throwing a glance from time to time over a group of young men that had gathered there. He heard his name mentioned after a turn or two. Although they lowered their voices,

Raphael easily guessed that he had become the topic of their debate, and he ended by catching a phrase or two spoken aloud.

"You?"

"Yes, I."

"I dare you to do it!"

"Let us make a bet on it!"

"Oh, he will do it."

Just as Valentin, curious to learn the matter of the wager, came up to pay closer attention to what they were saying, a tall, strong, good-looking young fellow, who, however, possessed the impertinent stare peculiar to people who have material force at their back, came out of the billiard-room.

"I am deputed, sir," he said coolly addressing the Marquis, "to make you aware of something which you do not seem to know; your face and person generally are a source of annoyance to every one here, and to me in particular. You have too much politeness not to sacrifice yourself to the public good, and I beg that you will not show yourself in the Club again."

"This sort of joke has been perpetrated before, sir, in garrison towns at the time of the Empire; but nowadays it is exceedingly bad form," said Raphael drily.

"I am not joking," the young man answered; "and I repeat it: your health will be considerably the worse for a stay here; the heat and light, the air of the saloon, and the company are all bad for your complaint."

"Where did you study medicine?" Raphael inquired.

"I took my bachelor's degree on Lepage's shooting-ground in Paris, and was made a doctor at Cerizier's, the king of foils."

"There is one last degree left for you to take," said Valentin; "study the ordinary rules of politeness, and you will be a perfect gentleman."

The young men all came out of the billiard-room just then, some disposed to laugh, some silent. The attention of other

players was drawn to the matter; they left their cards to watch a quarrel that rejoiced their instincts. Raphael, alone among this hostile crowd, did his best to keep cool, and not to put himself in any way in the wrong; but his adversary having ventured a sarcasm containing an insult couched in unusually keen lauguage, he replied gravely:

"We cannot box men's ears, sir, in these days, but I am at a loss for any word by which to stigmatize such cowardly behavior as yours."

"That's enough, that's enough. You can come to an explanation to-morrow," several young men exclaimed, interposing between the two champions.

Raphael left the room in the character of aggressor, after he had accepted a proposal to meet near the Château de Bordeau, in a little sloping meadow, not very far from the newly made road, by which the man who came off victorious could reach Lyons. Raphael must now either take to his bed or leave the baths. The visitors had gained their point. At eight o'clock next morning his antagonist, followed by two seconds and a surgeon, arrived first on the ground.

"We shall do very nicely here; glorious weather for a duel!" he cried gaily, looking at the blue vault of sky above, at the waters of the lake, and the rocks, without a single melancholy presentiment or doubt of the issue. "If I wing him," he went on, "I shall send him to bed for a month; eh, doctor?"

"At the very least," the surgeon replied; "but let that willow twig alone, or you will weary your wrist, and then you will not fire steadily. You might kill your man then instead of wounding him."

The noise of a carriage was heard approaching.

"Here he is," said the seconds, who soon descried a calèche coming along the road; it was drawn by four horses, and there were two postilions.

"What a queer proceeding!" said Valentin's antagonist; "here he comes post-haste to be shot."

The slightest incident about a duel, as about a stake at cards, makes an impression on the minds of those deeply

concerned in the results of the affair; so the young man awaited the arrival of the carriage with a kind of uneasiness. It stopped in the road; old Jonathan laboriously descended from it, in the first place, to assist Raphael to alight; he supported him with his feeble arms, and showed him all the minute attentions that a lover lavishes upon his mistress. Both became lost to sight in the footpath that lay between the highroad and the field where the duel was to take place; they were walking slowly, and did not appear again for some time after. The four onlookers at this strange spectacle felt deeply moved by the sight of Valentin as he leaned on his servant's arm; he was wasted and pale; he limped as if he had the gout, went with his head bowed down, and said not a word. You might have taken them for a couple of old men, one broken with years, the other worn out with thought; the elder bore his age visibly written in his white hair, the younger was of no age.

"I have not slept all night, sir;" so Raphael greeted his antagonist.

The icy tone and terrible glance that went with the words made the real aggressor shudder; he knew that he was in the wrong, and felt in secret ashamed of his behavior. There was something strange in Raphael's bearing, tone, and gesture; the Marquis stopped, and every one else was likewise silent. The uneasy and constrained feeling grew to a height.

"There is yet time," he went on, "to offer me some slight apology; and offer it you must, or you will die, sir! You rely even now on your dexterity, and do not shrink from an encounter in which you believe all the advantage to be upon your side. Very good, sir; I am generous, I am letting you know my superiority beforehand. I possess a terrible power. I have only to wish to do so, and I can neutralize your skill, dim your eyesight, make your hand and pulse unsteady, and even kill you outright. I have no wish to be compelled to exercise my power; the use of it costs me too dear. You would not be the only one to die. So if you refuse to

apologize to me, no matter what your experience in murder, your ball will go into the waterfall there, and mine will speed straight to your heart though I do not aim it at you."

Confused voices interrupted Raphael at this point. All the time that he was speaking, the Marquis had kept his intolerably keen gaze fixed upon his antagonist; now he drew himself up and showed an impassive face, like that of a dangerous madman.

"Make him hold his tongue," the young man had said to one of his seconds; "that voice of his is tearing the heart out of me."

"Say no more, sir; it is quite useless," cried the seconds and the surgeon, addressing Raphael.

"Gentlemen, I am fulfilling a duty. Has this young gentleman any final arrangements to make?"

"That is enough; that will do."

The Marquis remained standing steadily, never for a moment losing sight of his antagonist; and the latter seemed, like a bird before a snake, to be overwhelmed by a well-nigh magical power. He was compelled to endure that homicidal gaze; he met and shunned it incessantly.

"I am thirsty; give me some water——" he said again to the second.

"Are you nervous?"

"Yes," he answered. "There is a fascination about that man's glowing eyes."

"Will you apologize?"

"It is too late now."

The two antagonists were placed at fifteen paces distant from each other. Each of them had a brace of pistols at hand, and, according to the programme prescribed for them, each was to fire twice when and how he pleased, but after the signal had been given by the seconds.

"What are you doing, Charles?" exclaimed the young man who acted as second to Raphael's antagonist; "you are putting in the ball before the powder!"

"I am a dead man," he muttered, by way of answer; "you have put me facing the sun——"

"The sun lies behind you," said Valentin sternly and solemnly, while he coolly loaded his pistol without heeding the fact that the signal had been given, or that his antagonist was carefully taking aim.

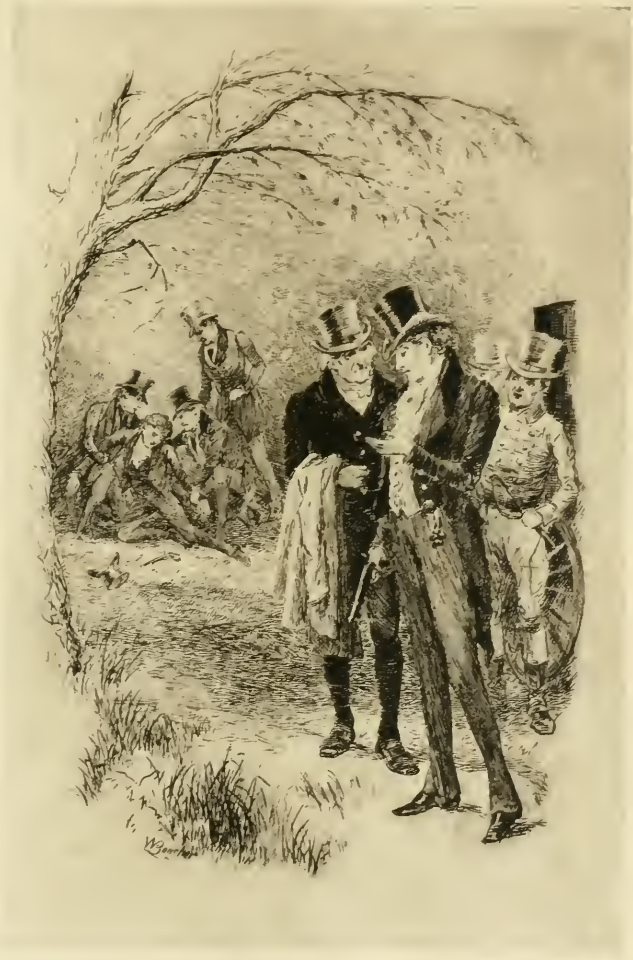
There was something so appalling in this supernatural unconcern, that it affected even the two postilions, brought thither by a cruel curiosity. Raphael was either trying his power or playing with it, for he talked to Jonathan, and looked towards him as he received his adversary's fire. Charles' bullet broke a branch of willow, and ricocheted over the surface of the water; Raphael fired at random, and shot his antagonist through the heart. He did not heed the young man as he dropped; he hurriedly sought the Magic Skin to see what another man's life had cost him. The talisman was no larger than a small oak-leaf.

"What are you gaping at, you postilions over there? Let us be off," said the Marquis.

That same evening he crossed the French border, immediately set out for Auvergne, and reached the springs of Mont Dore. As he traveled, there surged up in his heart, all at once, one of those thoughts that come to us as a ray of sunlight pierces through the thick mists in some dark valley—a sad enlightenment, a pitiless sagacity that lights up the accomplished fact for us, that lays our errors bare, and leaves us without excuse in our own eyes. It suddenly struck him that the possession of power, no matter how enormous, did not bring with it the knowledge how to use it. The sceptre is a plaything for a child, an axe for a Richelieu, and for a Napoleon a lever by which to move the world. Power leaves us just as it finds us; only great natures grow greater by its means. Raphael had had everything in his power, and he had done nothing.

At the springs of Mont Dore he came again in contact with a little world of people, who invariably shunned him with the eager haste that animals display when they scent afar off one of their own species lying dead, and flee away. The dislike was mutual. His late adventure had given him a deep

Raphael hurriedly sought the Magic Skin to see what another man's life had cost him



distaste for society; his first care, consequently, was to find a lodging at some distance from the neighborhood of the springs. Instinctively he felt within him the need of close contact with nature, of natural emotions, and of the vegetative life into which we sink so gladly among the fields.

The day after he arrived he climbed the Pic de Sancy, not without difficulty, and visited the higher valleys, the skyey nooks, undiscovered lakes, and peasants' huts about Mont Dore, a country whose stern and wild features are now beginning to tempt the brushes of our artists, for sometimes wonderfully fresh and charming views are to be found there, affording a strong contrast to the frowning brows of those lonely hills.

Barely a league from the village Raphael discovered a nook where nature seemed to have taken a pleasure in hiding away all her treasures like some glad and mischievous child. At the first sight of this unspoiled and picturesque retreat, he determined to take up his abode in it. There, life must needs be peaceful, natural, and fruitful, like the life of a plant.

Imagine for yourself an inverted cone of granite hollowed out on a large scale, a sort of basin with its sides divided up by queer winding paths. On one side lay level stretches with no growth upon them, a bluish uniform surface, over which the rays of the sun fell as upon a mirror; on the other lay cliffs split open by fissures and frowning ravines; great blocks of lava hung suspended from them, while the action of rain slowly prepared their impending fall; a few stunted trees, tormented by the wind, often crowned their summits; and here and there in some sheltered angle of their ramparts a clump of chestnut-trees grew tall as cedars, or some cavern in the yellowish rock showed the dark entrance into its depths, set about by flowers and brambles, decked by a little strip of green turf.

At the bottom of this cup, which perhaps had been the crater of an old-world volcano, lay a pool of water as pure and bright as a diamond. Granite boulders lay around the

deep basin, and willows, mountain-ash trees, yellow-flag lilies, and numberless aromatic plants bloomed about it, in a realm of meadow as fresh as an English bowling-green. The fine soft grass was watered by the streams that trickled through the fissures in the cliffs; the soil was continually enriched by the deposits of loam which storms washed down from the heights above. The pool might be some three acres in extent; its shape was irregular, and the edges were scalloped like the hem of a dress; the meadow might be an acre or two acres in extent. The cliffs and the water approached and receded from each other; here and there, there was scarcely width enough for the cows to pass between them.

After a certain height the plant life ceased. Aloft in air the granite took upon itself the most fantastic shapes, and assumed those misty tints that give to high mountains a dim resemblance to clouds in the sky. The bare, bleak cliffs, with the fearful rents in their sides, pictures of wild and barren desolation, contrasted strongly with the pretty view of the valley; and so strange were the shapes they assumed, that one of the cliffs had been called "The Capuchin," because it was so like a monk. Sometimes these sharp-pointed peaks, these mighty masses of rock, and airy caverns were lighted up one by one, according to the direction of the sun or the caprices of the atmosphere; they caught gleams of gold, dyed themselves in purple; took a tint of glowing rose-color, or turned dull and gray. Upon the heights a drama of color was always to be seen, a play of ever-shifting iridescent hues like those on a pigeon's breast.

Oftentimes at sunrise or at sunset a ray of bright sunlight would penetrate between two sheer surfaces of lava, that might have been split apart by a hatchet, to the very depths of that pleasant little garden, where it would play in the waters of the pool, like a beam of golden light which gleams through the chinks of a shutter into a room in Spain, that has been carefully darkened for a siesta. When the sun rose above the old crater that some antediluvian revolution had filled with water, its rocky sides took warmer tones, the extinct volcano

glowed again, and its sudden heat quickened the sprouting seeds and vegetation, gave color to the flowers, and ripened the fruits of this forgotten corner of the earth.

As Raphael reached it, he noticed several cows grazing in the pasture-land; and when he had taken a few steps towards the water, he saw a little house built of granite and roofed with shingle in the spot where the meadowland was at its widest. The roof of this little cottage harmonized with everything about it; for it had long been overgrown with ivy, moss, and flowers of no recent date. A thin smoke, that did not scare the birds away, went up from the dilapidated chimney. There was a great bench at the door between two huge honeysuckle bushes, that were pink with blossom and full of scent. The walls could scarcely be seen for branches of vine and sprays of rose and jessamine that interlaced and grew entirely as chance and their own will bade them; for the inmates of the cottage seemed to pay no attention to the growth which adorned their house, and to take no care of it, leaving to it the fresh capricious charm of nature.

Some clothes spread out on the gooseberry bushes were drying in the sun. A cat was sitting on a machine for stripping hemp; beneath it lay a newly scoured brass caldron, among a quantity of potato-parings. On the other side of the house Raphael saw a sort of barricade of dead thorn-bushes, meant no doubt to keep the poultry from scratching up the vegetables and pot-herbs. It seemed like the end of the earth. The dwelling was like some bird's-nest ingeniously set in a cranny of the rocks, a clever and at the same time a careless bit of workmanship. A simple and kindly nature lay round about it; its rusticity was genuine, but there was a charm like that of poetry in it; for it grew and throve at a thousand miles' distance from our elaborate and conventional poetry. It was like none of our conceptions; it was a spontaneous growth, a masterpiece due to chance.

As Raphael reached the place, the sunlight fell across it from right to left, bringing out all the colors of its plants and trees; the yellowish or gray bases of the crags, the different

shades of the green leaves, the masses of flowers, pink, blue, or white, the climbing plants with their bell-like blossoms, and the shot velvet of the mosses, the purple-tinted blooms of the heather,—everything was either brought into relief or made fairer yet by the enchantment of the light or by the contrasting shadows; and this was the case most of all with the sheet of water, wherein the house, the trees, the granite peaks, and the sky were all faithfully reflected. Everything had a radiance of its own in this delightful picture, from the sparkling mica-stone to the bleached tuft of grass hidden away in the soft shadows; the spotted cow with its glossy hide, the delicate water-plants that hung down over the pool like fringes in a nook where blue or emerald colored insects were buzzing about, the roots of trees like a sand-besprinkled shock of hair above grotesque faces in the flinty rock surface,—all these things made a harmony for the eye.

The odor of the tepid water; the scent of the flowers, and the breath of the caverns which filled the lonely place, gave Raphael a sensation that was almost enjoyment. Silence reigned in majesty over these woods, which possibly are unknown to the tax-collector; but the barking of a couple of dogs broke the stillness all at once; the cows turned their heads towards the entrance of the valley, showing their moist noses to Raphael, stared stupidly at him, and then fell to browsing again. A goat and her kid, that seemed to hang on the side of the crags in some magical fashion, capered and leapt to a slab of granite near to Raphael, and stayed there a moment, as if to seek to know who he was. The yapping of the dogs brought out a plump child, who stood agape, and next came a white-haired old man of middle height. Both of these two beings were in keeping with the surroundings, the air, the flowers, and the dwelling. Health appeared to overflow in this fertile region; old age and childhood thrived there. There seemed to be, about all these types of existence, the freedom and carelessness of the life of primitive times, a happiness of use and wont that gave the lie to our philosophical platitudes, and wrought a cure of all its swelling passions in the heart.

The old man belonged to the type of model dear to the masculine brush of Schnetz. The countless wrinkles upon his brown face looked as if they would be hard to the touch; the straight nose, the prominent cheek-bones, streaked with red veins like a vine-leaf in autumn, the angular features, all were characteristics of strength, even where strength existed no longer. The hard hands, now that they toiled no longer, had preserved their scanty white hair; his bearing was that of an absolutely free man; it suggested the thought that, had he been an Italian, he would have perhaps turned brigand, for the love of the liberty so dear to him. The child was a regular mountaineer, with the black eyes that can face the sun without flinching, a deeply tanned complexion, and rough brown hair. His movements were like a bird's—swift, decided, and unconstrained; his clothing was ragged; the white, fair skin showed through the rents in his garments. There they both stood in silence, side by side, both obeying the same impulse; in both faces were clear tokens of an absolutely identical and idle life. The old man had adopted the child's amusements, and the child had fallen in with the old man's humor; there was a sort of tacit agreement between two kinds of feebleness, between failing powers well-nigh spent and powers just about to unfold themselves.

Very soon a women who seemed to be about thirty years old appeared on the threshold of the door, spinning as she came. She was an Auvergnate, a high-colored, comfortable-looking, straightforward sort of person, with white teeth; her cap and dress, the face, full figure, and general appearance, were of the Auvergne peasant stamp. So was her dialect; she was a thorough embodiment of her district; its hard-working ways, its thrift, ignorance, and heartiness all met in her.

She greeted Raphael, and they began to talk. The dogs quieted down; the old man went and sat on a bench in the sun; the child followed his mother about wherever she went, listening without saying a word, and staring at the stranger.

"You are not afraid to live here, good woman?"

"What should we be afraid of, sir? When we bolt the door, who ever could get inside? Oh, no, we aren't afraid at all. And besides," she said, as she brought the Marquis into the principal room in the house, "what should thieves come to take from us here?"

She designated the room as she spoke; the smoke-blackened walls, with some brilliant pictures in blue, red, and green, an "End of Credit," a Crucifixion, and the "Grenadiers of the Imperial Guard" for their sole ornament; the furniture here and there, the old wooden four-post bedstead, the table with crooked legs, a few stools, the chest that held the bread, the flitch that hung from the ceiling, a jar of salt, a stove, and on the mantelshelf a few discolored yellow plaster figures. As he went out again Raphael noticed a man half-way up the crags, leaning on a hoe, and watching the house with interest.

"That's my man, sir," said the Auvergnate, unconsciously smiling in peasant fashion; "he is at work up there."

"And that old man is your father?"

"Asking your pardon, sir, he is my man's grandfather. Such as you see him, he is a hundred and two, and yet quite lately he walked over to Clermont with our little chap! Oh, he has been a strong man in his time; but he does nothing now but sleep and eat and drink. He amuses himself with the little fellow. Sometimes the child trails him up the hill-sides, and he will just go up there along with him."

Valentin made up his mind immediately. He would live between this child and old man, breathe the same air; eat their bread, drink the same water, sleep with them, make the blood in his veins like theirs. It was a dying man's fancy. For him the prime model, after which the customary existence of the individual should be shaped, the real formula for the life of a human being, the only true and possible life, the life-ideal, was to become one of the oysters adhering to this rock, to save his shell a day or two longer by paralyzing the power of death. One profoundly selfish thought took possession of him, and the whole universe was swallowed up and

lost in it. For him the universe existed no longer; the whole world had come to be within himself. For the sick, the world begins at their pillow and ends at the foot of the bed; and this countryside was Raphael's sick-bed.

Who has not, at some time or other in his life, watched the comings and goings of an ant, slipped straws into a yellow slug's one breathing-hole, studied the vagaries of a slender dragon-fly, pondered admiringly over the countless veins in an oak-leaf, that bring the colors of a rose window in some Gothic cathedral into contrast with the reddish background? Who has not looked long in delight at the effects of sun and rain on a roof of brown tiles, at the dewdrops, or at the variously shaped petals of the flower-cups? Who has not sunk into these idle, absorbing meditations on things without, that have no conscious end, yet lead to some definite thought at last? Who, in short, has not led a lazy life, the life of childhood, the life of the savage without his labor? This life without a care or a wish, Raphael led for some days' space. He felt a distinct improvement in his condition, a wonderful sense of ease, that quieted his apprehensions and soothed his sufferings.

He would climb the crags, and then find a seat high up on some peak whence he could see a vast expanse of distant country at a glance, and he would spend whole days in this way, like a plant in the sun, or a hare in its form. And at last, growing familiar with the appearances of the plant-life about him, and of the changes in the sky, he minutely noted the progress of everything working around him in the water, on the earth, or in the air. He tried to share the secret impulses of nature, sought by passive obedience to become a part of it, and to lie within the conservative and despotic jurisdiction that regulates instinctive existence. He no longer wished to steer his own course.

Just as criminals in olden times were safe from the pursuit of justice, if they took refuge under the shadow of the altar, so Raphael made an effort to slip into the sanctuary of life. He succeeded in becoming an integral part of the great and

mighty fruit-producing organization; he had adapted himself to the inclemency of the air, and had dwelt in every cave among the rocks. He had learned the ways and habits of growth of every plant, had studied the laws of the water-courses and their beds, and had come to know the animals; he was at last so perfectly at one with this teeming earth, that he had in some sort discerned its mysteries and caught the spirit of it.

The infinitely varied forms of every natural kingdom were, to his thinking, only developments of one and the same substance, different combinations brought about by the same impulse, endless emanations from a measureless Being which was acting, thinking, moving, and growing, and in harmony with which he longed to grow, to move, to think, and act. He had fancifully blended his life with the life of the crags; he had deliberately planted himself there. During the earliest days of his sojourn in these pleasant surroundings, Valentin tasted all the pleasures of childhood again, thanks to the strange hallucination of apparent convalescence, which is not unlike the pauses of delirium that nature mercifully provides for those in pain. He went about making trifling discoveries, setting to work on endless things, and finishing none of them; the evening's plans were quite forgotten in the morning; he had no cares, he was happy; he thought himself saved.

One morning he had lain in bed till noon, deep in the dreams between sleep and waking, which give to realities a fantastic appearance, and make the wildest fancies seem solid facts; while he was still uncertain that he was not dreaming yet, he suddenly heard his hostess giving a report of his health of Jonathan, for the first time. Jonathan came to inquire after him daily, and the Auvergnate, thinking no doubt that Valentin was still asleep, had not lowered the tones of a voice developed in mountain air.

"No better and no worse," she said. "He coughed all last night again fit to kill himself. Poor gentleman, he coughs and spits till it is piteous. My husband and I often wonder

to each other where he gets the strength from to cough like that. It goes to your heart. What a cursed complaint it it! He has no strength at all. I am always afraid I shall find him dead in his bed some morning. He is every bit as pale as a waxen Christ. *Dame!* I watch him while he dresses; his poor body is as thin as a nail. And he does not feel well now; but no matter. It's all the same; he wears himself out with running about as if he had health and to spare. All the same, he is very brave, for he never complains at all. But really he would be better under the earth than on it, for he is enduring the agonies of Christ. I don't wish that myself, sir; it is quite against our interests; but even it he didn't pay us what he does, I should be just as fond of him; it is not our own interest that is our motive."

"Ah, mon Dieu!" she continued, "Parisians are the people for these dogs' diseases. Where did he catch it, now? Poor young man! And he is so sure that he is going to get well! That fever just gnaws him, you know; it eats him away; it will be the death of him. He has no notion whatever of that; he does not know it, sir; he sees nothing——You musn't cry about him, M. Jonathan; you must remember that he will be happy, and will not suffer any more. You ought to make a *neuvaine* for him; I have seen wonderful cures come of a nine days' prayer, and I would gladly pay for a wax taper to save such a gentle creature, so good he is, a paschal lamb——"

As Raphael's voice had grown too weak to allow him to make himself heard, he was compelled to listen to this horrible loquacity. His irritation, however, drove him out of bed at length, and he appeared upon the threshold.

"Old scoundrel!" he shouted to Jonathan; "do you mean to put me to death?"

The peasant woman took him for a ghost, and fled.

"I forbid you to have any anxiety whatever about my health," Raphael went on.

"Yes, my Lord Marquis," said the old servant, wiping away his tears.

"And for the future you had very much better not come here without my orders."

Jonathan meant to be obedient, but in the look full of pity and devotion that he gave the Marquis before he went, Raphael read his own death-warrant. Utterly disheartened, brought all at once to a sense of his real position, Valentin sat down on the threshold, locked his arms across his chest, and bowed his head. Jonathan turned to his master in alarm, with "My Lord——"

"Go away, go away," cried the invalid.

In the hours of the next morning, Raphael climbed the crags, and sat down in a mossy cleft in the rocks, whence he could see the narrow path along which the water for the dwelling was carried. At the base of the hill he saw Jonathan in conversation with the Auvergnate. Some malicious power interpreted for him all the woman's head-shakings, melancholy gestures, and garrulous forebodings, and filled the breeze and the silence with her ominous words. Thrilled with horror, he took refuge among the highest summits of the mountains, and stayed there till the evening; but yet he could not drive away the gloomy presentiments awakened within him in such an unfortunate manner by a cruel solicitude on his account.

The Auvergne peasant herself suddenly appeared before him like a shadow in the dusk; a perverse freak of the poet within him found a vague resemblance between her black and white striped petticoat and the bony frame of a spectre.

"The damp is falling now, sir," said she. "If you stop out there, you will go off just like rotten fruit. You must come in. It isn't healthy to breathe the damp, and you have taken nothing since the morning, besides."

"*Tonnerre de Dieu!* old witch," he cried; "let me live after my own fashion, I tell you, or I shall be off altogether. It is quite bad enough to dig my grave every morning; you might let it alone in the evenings at least——"

"Your grave, sir! I dig your grave!—and where may your grave be? I want to see you as old as father there, and

not in your grave by any manner of means. The grave! that comes soon enough for us all; in the grave——"

"That is enough," said Raphael.

"Take my arm, sir."

"No."

The feeling of pity in others is very difficult for a man to bear, and it is hardest of all when the pity is deserved. Hatred is a tonic—it quickens life and stimulates revenge; but pity is death to us—it makes our weakness weaker still. It is as if distress simpered ingratiatingly at us; contempt lurks in the tenderness, or tenderness in an affront. In the centenarian Raphael saw triumphant pity, a wondering pity in the child's eyes, an officious pity in the woman, and in her husband a pity that had an interested motive; but no matter how the sentiment declared itself, death was always its import.

A poet makes a poem of everything; it is tragical or joyful, as things happen to strike his imagination; his lofty soul rejects all half-tones; he always prefers vivid and decided colors. In Raphael's soul this compassion produced a terrible poem of mourning and melancholy. When he had wished to live in close contact with nature, he had of course forgotten how freely natural emotions are expressed. He would think himself quite alone under a tree, whilst he struggled with an obstinate coughing fit, a terrible combat from which he never issued victorious without utter exhaustion afterwards; and then he would meet the clear, bright eyes of the little boy, who occupied the post of sentinel, like a savage in a bent of grass; the eyes scrutinized him with a childish wonder, in which there was as much amusement as pleasure, and an indescribable mixture of indifference and interest. The awful *Brother, you must die,* of the Trappists seemed constantly legible in the eyes of the peasants with whom Raphael was living; he scarcely knew which he dreaded most, their unfettered talk or their silence; their presence became torture.

One morning he saw two men in black prowling about in

his neighborhood, who furtively studied him and took observations. They made as though they had come there for a stroll, and asked him a few indifferent questions, to which he returned short answers. He recognized them both. One was the curé and the other the doctor at the springs; Jonathan had no doubt sent them, or the people in the house had called them in, or the scent of an approaching death had drawn them thither. He beheld his own funeral, heard the chanting of the priests, and counted the tall wax candles; and all that lovely fertile nature around him, in whose lap he had thought to find life once more, he saw no longer, save through a veil of crape. Everything that but lately had spoken of length of days to him, now prophesied a speedy end. He set out the next day for Paris, not before he had been inundated with cordial wishes, which the people of the house uttered in melancholy and wistful tones for his benefit.

He traveled through the night, and awoke as they passed through one of the pleasant valleys of the Bourbonnais. View after view swam before his gaze, and passed rapidly away like the vague pictures of a dream. Cruel nature spread herself out before his eyes with tantalizing grace. Sometimes the Allier, a liquid shining riband, meandered through the distant fertile landscape; then followed the steeples of hamlets, hiding modestly in the depths of a ravine with its yellow cliffs; sometimes, after the monotony of vineyards, the water-mills of a little valley would be suddenly seen; and everywhere there were pleasant châteaux, hillside villages, roads with their fringes of queenly poplars; and the Loire itself, at last, with its wide sheets of water sparkling like diamonds amid its golden sands. Attractions everywhere, without end! This nature, all astir with a life and gladness like that of childhood, scarcely able to contain the impulses and sap of June, possessed a fatal attraction for the darkened gaze of the invalid. He drew the blinds of his carriage windows, and betook himself again to slumber.

Towards evening, after they had passed Cesne, he was awakened by lively music, and found himself confronted with

a village fair. The horses were changed near the market-place. Whilst the postilions were engaged in making the transfer, he saw the people dancing merrily, pretty and attractive girls with flowers about them, excited youths, and finally the jolly wine-flushed countenances of old peasants. Children prattled, old women laughed and chatted; everything spoke in one voice, and there was a holiday gaiety about everything, down to their clothing and the tables that were set out. A cheerful expression pervaded the square and the church, the roofs and windows; even the very doorways of the village seemed likewise to be in holiday trim.

Raphael could not repress an angry exclamation, nor yet a wish to silence the fiddles, annihilate the stir and bustle, stop the clamor, and disperse the ill-timed festival; like a dying man, he felt unable to endure the slightest sound, and he entered his carriage much annoyed. When he looked out upon the square from the window, he saw that all the happiness was scared away; the peasant women were in flight, and the benches were deserted. Only a blind musician, on the scaffolding of the orchestra, went on playing a shrill tune on his clarionet. That piping of his, without dancers to it, and the solitary old man himself, in the shadow of the lime-tree, with his curmudgeon's face, scanty hair, and ragged clothing, was like a fantastic picture of Raphael's wish. The heavy rain was pouring in torrents; it was one of those thunderstorms that June brings about so rapidly, to cease as suddenly. The thing was so natural, that, when Raphael had looked out and seen some pale clouds driven over by a gust of wind, he did not think of looking at the piece of skin. He lay back again in the corner of his carriage, which was very soon rolling upon its way.

The next day found him back in his home again, in his own room, beside his own fireside. He had had a large fire lighted; he felt cold. Jonathan brought him some letters; they were all from Pauline. He opened the first one without any eagerness, and unfolded it as if it had been the gray-

paper form of application for taxes made by the revenue collector. He read the first sentence:

"Gone! This really is a flight, my Raphael. How it is? No one can tell me where you are. And who should know if not I?"

He did not wish to learn any more. He calmly took up the letters and threw them in the fire, watching with dull and lifeless eyes the perfumed paper as it was twisted, shriveled, bent, and devoured by the capricious flames. Fragments that fell among the ashes allowed him to see the beginning of a sentence, or a half-burnt thought or word; he took a pleasure in deciphering them—a sort of mechanical amusement.

"Sitting at your door—expected—Caprice—I obey—Rivals—I, never!—thy Pauline—love—no more of Pauline?—If you had wished to leave me for ever, you would not have deserted me—Love eternal—To die——"

The words caused him a sort of remorse; he seized the tongs, and rescued a last fragment of the letter from the flames.

"I have murmured," so Pauline wrote, "but I have never complained, my Raphael! If you have left me so far behind you, it was doubtless because you wished to hide some heavy grief from me. Perhaps you will kill me one of these days, but you are too good to torture me. So do not go away from me like this. There! I can bear the worst of torment, if only I am at your side. Any grief that you could cause me would not be grief. There is far more love in my heart for you than I have ever yet shown you. I can endure anything, except this weeping far away from you, this ignorance of your——"

Raphael laid the scorched scrap on the mantelpiece, then all at once he flung it into the fire. The bit of paper was too clearly a symbol of his own love and luckless existence.

"Go and find M. Bianchon," he told Jonathan.

Horace came and found Raphael in bed.

"Can you prescribe a draught for me—some mild opiate which will always keep me in a somnolent condition,

a draught that will not be injurious although taken constantly."

"Nothing is easier," the young doctor replied; "but you will have to keep on your feet for a few hours daily, at any rate, so as to take your food."

"A few hours!" Raphael broke in; "no, no! I only wish to be out of bed for an hour at most."

"What is your object?" inquired Bianchon.

"To sleep; for so one keeps alive, at any rate," the patient answered. "Let no one come in, not even Mlle. Pauline de Vitschnau!" he added to Jonathan, as the doctor was writing out his prescription.

"Well, M. Horace, is there any hope?" the old servant asked, going as far as the flight of steps before the door, with the young doctor.

"He may live for some time yet, or he may die to-night. The chances of life and death are evenly balanced in his case. I can't understand it at all," said the doctor, with a doubtful gesture. "His mind ought to be diverted."

"Diverted! Ah, sir, you don't know him! He killed a man the other day without a word!—Nothing can divert him!"

For some days Raphael lay plunged in the torpor of this artificial sleep. Thanks to the material power that opium exerts over the immaterial part of us, this man with the powerful and active imagination reduced himself to the level of those sluggish forms of animal life that lurk in the depths of forests, and take the form of vegetable refuse, never stirring from their place to catch their easy prey. He had darkened the very sun in heaven; the daylight never entered his room. About eight o'clock in the evening he would leave his bed, with no very clear consciousness of his own existence; he would satisfy the claims of hunger and return to bed immediately. One dull blighted hour after another only brought confused pictures and appearances before him, and lights and shadows against a background of darkness. He lay buried in deep silence; movement and intelligence

were completely annihilated for him. He woke later than usual one evening, and found that his dinner was not ready. He rang for Jonathan.

"You can go," he said. "I have made you rich; you shall be happy in your old age; but I will not let you muddle away my life any longer. Miserable wretch! I am hungry—where is my dinner? How is it?—Answer me!"

A satisfied smile stole over Jonathan's face. He took a candle that lit up the great dark rooms of the mansion with its flickering light; brought his master, who had again become an automaton, into a great gallery, and flung a door suddenly open. Raphael was all at once dazzled by a flood of light and amazed by an unheard-of scene.

His chandeliers had been filled with wax-lights; the rarest flowers from his conservatory were carefully arranged about the room; the table sparkled with silver, gold, crystal, and porcelain; a royal banquet was spread—the odors of the tempting dishes tickled the nervous fibres of the palate. There sat his friends; he saw them among beautiful women in full evening dress, with bare necks and shoulders, with flowers in their hair; fair women of every type, with sparkling eyes, attractively and fancifully arrayed. One had adopted an Irish jacket, which displayed the alluring outlines of her form; one wore the "basquina" of Andalusia, with its wanton grace; here was a half-clad Dian the huntress, there the costume of Mlle. de la Vallière, amorous and coy; and all of them alike were given up to the intoxication of the moment.

As Raphael's death-pale face showed itself in the doorway, a sudden outcry broke out, as vehement as the blaze of this improvised banquet. The voices, perfumes, and lights, the exquisite beauty of the women, produced their effect upon his senses, and awakened his desires. Delightful music, from unseen players in the next room, drowned the excited tumult in a torrent of harmony—the whole strange vision was complete.

Raphael felt a caressing pressure of his own hand, a wo-

man's white, youthful arms were stretched out to grasp him, and the hand was Aquilina's. He knew now that this scene was not a fantastic illusion like the fleeting pictures of his disordered dreams; he uttered a dreadful cry, slammed the door, and dealt his heartbroken old servant a blow in the face.

"Monster!" he cried, "so you have sworn to kill me!" and trembling at the risks he had just now run, he summoned all his energies, reached his room, took a powerful sleeping draught, and went to bed.

"The devil!" cried Jonathan, recovering himself. "And M. Bianchon most certainly told me to divert his mind."

It was close upon midnight. By that time, owing to one of those physical caprices that are the marvel and the despair of science, Raphael, in his slumber, became radiant with beauty. A bright color glowed on his pale cheeks. There was an almost girlish grace about the forehead in which his genius was revealed. Life seemed to bloom on the quiet face that lay there at rest. His sleep was sound; a light, even breath was drawn in between the red lips; he was smiling—he had passed no doubt through the gate of dreams into a noble life. Was he a centenarian now? Did his grandchildren come to wish him length of days? Or, on a rustic bench set in the sun and under the trees, was he scanning, like the prophet on the mountain heights, a promised land, a far-off time of blessing.

"Here you are!"

The words, uttered in silver tones, dispelled the shadowy faces of his dreams. He saw Pauline, in the lamplight, sitting upon the bed; Pauline grown fairer yet through sorrow and separation. Raphael remained bewildered by the sight of her face, white as the petals of some water flower, and the shadow of her long, dark hair about it seemed to make it whiter still. Her tears had left a gleaming trace upon her cheeks, and hung there yet, ready to fall at the least movement. She looked like an angel fallen from the skies, or a spirit that a breath might waft away, as she sat there all in

white, with her head bowed, scarcely creasing the quilt beneath her weight.

"Ah, I have forgotten everything!" she cried, as Raphael opened his eyes. "I have no voice left except to tell you, 'I am yours.' There is nothing in my heart but love. Angel of my life, you have never been so beautiful before! Your eyes are blazing—— But come, I can guess it all. You have been in search of health without me; you were afraid of me——well——"

"Go! go! leave me," Raphael muttered at last. "Why do you not go? If you stay, I shall die. Do you want to see me die?"

"Die?" she echoed. "Can you die without me? Die? But you are young; and I love you! Die?" she asked, in a deep, hollow voice. She seized his hands with a frenzied movement. "Cold!" she wailed. "Is it all an illusion?"

Raphael drew the little bit of skin from under his pillow; it was as tiny and as fragile as a periwinkle-petal. He showed it to her.

"Pauline!" he said, "fair image of my fair life, let us say good-bye."

"Good-bye?" she echoed, looking surprised.

"Yes. This is a talisman that grants all my wishes, and that represents my span of life. See here, this is all that remains of it. If you look at me any longer, I shall die——"

The young girl thought that Valentin had grown light-headed; she took the talisman and went to fetch the lamp. By its tremulous light which she shed over Raphael and the talisman, she scanned her lover's face and the last morsel of the magic skin. As Pauline stood there, in all the beauty of love and terror, Raphael was no longer able to control his thoughts; memories of tender scenes, and of passionate and fevered joys, overwhelmed the soul that had so long lain dormant within him, and kindled a fire not quite extinct.

"Pauline! Pauline! Come to me——"

A dreadful cry came from the girl's throat, her eyes dilated

with horror, her eyebrows were distorted and drawn apart by an unspeakable anguish; she read in Raphael's eyes the vehement desire in which she had once exulted, but as it grew she felt a light movement in her hand, and the skin contracted. She did not stop to think; she fled into the next room, and locked the door.

"Pauline! Pauline!" cried the dying man, as he rushed after her; "I love you, I adore you, I want you, Pauline! I must curse you if you will not open the door for me. I wish to die in your arms!"

With unnatural strength, the last effort of ebbing life, he broke down the door, and saw his mistress writhing upon a sofa. Pauline had vainly tried to pierce her heart, and now thought to find a rapid death by strangling herself with her shawl.

"If I die, he will live," she said, trying to tighten the knot that she had made.

In her struggle with death her hair hung loose, her shoulders were bare, her clothing was disordered, her eyes were bathed in tears, her face was flushed and drawn with the horror of despair; yet as her exceeding beauty met Raphael's intoxicated eyes, his delirium grew. He sprang towards her like a bird of prey, tore away the shawl, and tried to take her in his arms.

The dying man sought for words to express the wish that was consuming his strength; but no sounds would come except the choking death-rattle in his chest. Each breath he drew sounded hollower than the last, and seemed to come from his very entrails. At the last moment, no longer able to utter a sound, he set his teeth in Pauline's breast. Jonathan appeared, terrified by the cries he had heard, and tried to tear away the dead body from the grasp of the girl who was crouching with it in a corner.

"What do you want?" she asked. "He is mine, I have killed him. Did I not foresee how it would be?"

EPILOGUE

"And what became of Pauline?"

"Pauline? Ah! Do you sometimes spend a pleasant winter evening by your own fireside, and give yourself up luxuriously to memories of love or youth, while you watch the glow of the fire where the logs of oak are burning? Here, the fire outlines a sort of chessboard in red squares, there it has a sheen like velvet; little blue flames start up and flicker and play about in the glowing depths of the brasier. A mysterious artist comes and adapts that flame to his own ends; by a secret of his own he draws a visionary face in the midst of those flaming violet and crimson hues, a face with unimaginable delicate outlines, a fleeting apparition which no chance will ever bring back again. It is a woman's face, her hair is blown back by the wind, her features speak of a rapture of delight; she breathes fire in the midst of the fire. She smiles, she dies, you will never see her any more. Farewell, flower of the flame! Farewell, essence incomplete and unforeseen, come too early or too late to make the spark of some glorious diamond."

"But, Pauline?"

"You do not see, then? I will begin again. Make way! make way! She comes, she is here, the queen of illusions, a woman fleeting as a kiss, a woman bright as lightning, issuing in a blaze like lightning from the sky, a being uncreated, of spirit and love alone. She has wrapped her shadowy form in flame, or perhaps the flame betokens that she exists but for a moment. The pure outlines of her shape tell you that she comes from heaven. Is she not radiant as an angel? Can you not hear the beating of her wings in space? She sinks down beside you more lightly than a bird, and you are entranced by her awful eyes; there is a magical power in her light breathing that draws your lips to hers; she flies and you follow; you feel the earth beneath you no longer. If you could but once touch that form of snow with your eager, deluded hands, once twine

the golden hair round your fingers, place one kiss on those shining eyes! There is an intoxicating vapor around, and the spell of a siren music is upon you. Every nerve in you is quivering; you are filled with pain and longing. O joy for which there is no name! You have touched the woman's lips, and you are wakened at once by a horrible pang. Oh! ah! yes, you have struck your head against the corner of the bed-post, you have been clasping its brown mahogany sides, and chilly gilt ornaments; embracing a piece of metal, a brazen Cupid."

"But how about Pauline, sir?"

"What, again? Listen. One lovely morning at Tours a young man, who held the hand of a pretty woman in his, went on board the *Ville d'Angers.* Thus united they both looked and wondered long at a white form that rose elusively out of the mists above the broad waters of the Loire, like some child of the sun and the river, or some freak of air and cloud. This translucent form was a sylph or a naiad by turns; she hovered in the air like a word that haunts the memory, which seeks in vain to grasp it; she glided among the islands, she nodded her head here and there among the tall poplar trees; then she grew to a giant's height; she shook out the countless folds of her drapery to the light; she shot light from the aureole that the sun had litten about her face; she hovered above the slopes of the hills and their little hamlets, and seemed to bar the passage of the boat before the Château d'Ussé. You might have thought that *La dame des belles cousines* sought to protect her country from modern intrusion."

"Well, well, I understand. So it went with Pauline. But how about Fœdora?"

"Oh! Fœdora, you are sure to meet with her! She was at the Bouffons last night, and she will go to the Opera this evening, and if you like to take it so, she is Society."

CHRIST IN FLANDERS

To Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, a daughter of Flanders, of whom these mode n days may well be proud, I dedicate this quaint legend of old Flanders.

De Balzac.

At a dimly remote period in the history of Brabant, communication between the Island of Cadzand and the Flemish coast was kept up by a boat which carried passengers from one shore to the other. Middelburg, the chief town in the island, destined to become so famous in the annals of Protestantism, at that time only numbered some two or three hundred hearths; and the prosperous town of Ostend was an obscure haven, a straggling village where pirates dwelt in security among the fishermen and the few poor merchants who lived in the place.

But though the town of Ostend consisted altogether of some score of houses and three hundred cottages, huts or hovels built of the driftwood of wrecked vessels, it nevertheless rejoiced in the possession of a governor, a garrison, a forked gibbet, a convent, and a burgomaster, in short, in all the institutions of an advanced civilization.

Who reigned over Brabant and Flanders in those days? On this point tradition is mute. Let us confess at once that this tale savors strongly of the marvelous, the mysterious, and the vague; elements which Flemish narrators have infused into a story retailed so often to gatherings of workers on winter evenings, that the versions vary widely in poetic merit and incongruity of detail. It has been told by every generation, handed down by grandames at the fireside, narrated night and day, and the chronicle has changed its complexion somewhat in every age. Like some great building that has suffered many modifications of successive genera-

tions of architects, some sombre weather-beaten pile, the delight of a poet, the story would drive the commentator and the industrious winnower of words, facts, and dates to despair. The narrator believes in it, as all superstitious minds in Flanders likewise believe; and is not a whit wiser nor more credulous than his audience. But as it would be impossible to make a harmony of all the different renderings, here are the outlines of the story; stripped, it may be, of its picturesque quaintness, but with all its bold disregard of historical truth, and its moral teaching approved by religion—a myth, the blossom of imaginative fancy; an allegory that the wise may interpret to suit themselves. To each his own pasturage, and the task of separating the tares from the wheat.

The boat that served to carry passengers from the Island of Cadzand to Ostend was upon the point of departure; but before the skipper loosed the chain that secured the shallop to the little jetty, where people embarked, he blew a horn several times, to warn late lingerers, this being his last journey that day. Night was falling. It was scarcely possible to see the coast of Flanders by the dying fires of the sunset, or to make out upon the hither shore any forms of belated passengers hurrying along the wall of the dykes that surrounded the open country, or among the tall reeds of the marshes. The boat was full.

"What are you waiting for? Let us put off!" they cried.

Just at that moment a man appeared a few paces from the jetty, to the surprise of the skipper, who had heard no sound of footsteps. The traveler seemed to have sprung up from the earth, like a peasant who had laid himself down on the ground to wait till the boat should start, and had slept till the sound of the horn awakened him. Was he a thief? or some one belonging to the custom-house or the police?

As soon as the man appeared on the jetty to which the boat was moored, seven persons who were standing in the stern of the shallop hastened to sit down on the benches, so as to leave no room for the newcomer. It was the swift and

instinctive working of the aristocratic spirit, an impulse of exclusiveness that comes from the rich man's heart. Four of the seven personages belonged to the most aristocratic families in Flanders. First among them was a young knight with two beautiful greyhounds; his long hair flowed from beneath a jeweled cap; he clanked his gilded spurs, curled the ends of his moustache from time to time with a swaggering grace, and looked round disdainfully on the rest of the crew. A high-born damsel, with a falcon on her wrist, only spoke with her mother or with a churchman of high rank, who was evidently a relation. All these persons made a great deal of noise, and talked among themselves as though there were no one else in the boat; yet close beside them sat a man of great importance in the district, a stout burgher of Bruges, wrapped about with a vast cloak. His servant, armed to the teeth, had set down a couple of bags filled with gold at his side. Next to the burgher came a man of learning, a doctor of the University of Louvain, who was traveling with his clerk. This little group of folk, who looked contemptuously at each other, was separated from the passengers in the forward part of the boat by the bench of rowers.

The belated traveler glanced about him as he stepped on board, saw that there was no room for him in the stern, and went to the bows in quest of a seat. They were all poor people there. At first sight of the bareheaded man in the brown camlet coat and trunk-hose, and plain stiff linen collar, they noticed that he wore no ornaments, carried no cap nor bonnet in his hand, and had neither sword nor purse at his girdle, and one and all took him for a burgomaster sure of his authority, a worthy and kindly burgomaster like so many a Fleming of old times, whose homely features and characters have been immortalized by Flemish painters. The poorer passengers, therefore, received him with demonstrations of respect that provoked scornful tittering at the other end of the boat. An old soldier, inured to toil and hardship, gave up his place on the bench to the newcomer, and seated himself on the edge of the vessel, keeping his balance by plant-

ing his feet against one of those transverse beams, like the backbone of a fish, that hold the planks of a boat together. A young mother, who bore her baby in her arms, and seemed to belong to the working class in Ostend, moved aside to make room for the stranger. There was neither servility nor scorn in her manner of doing this; it was a simple sign of the goodwill by which the poor, who know by long experience the value of a service and the warmth that fellowship brings, give expression to the open-heartedness and the natural impulses of their souls; so artlessly do they reveal their good qualities and their defects. The stranger thanked her by a gesture full of gracious dignity, and took his place between the young mother and the old soldier. Immediately behind him sat a peasant and his son, a boy ten years of age. A beggar woman, old, wrinkled, and clad in rags, was crouching, with her almost empty wallet, on a great coil of rope that lay in the prow. One of the rowers, an old sailor, who had known her in the days of her beauty and prosperity, had let her come in "for the love of God," in the beautiful phrase that the common people use.

"Thank you kindly, Thomas," the old woman had said. "I will say two *Paters* and two *Aves* for you in my prayers to-night."

The skipper blew his horn for the last time, looked along the silent shore, flung off the chain, ran along the side of the boat, and took up his position at the helm. He looked at the sky, and as soon as they were out in the open sea, he shouted to the men: "Pull away, pull with all your might! The sea is smiling at a squall, the witch! I can feel the swell by the way the rudder works, and the storm in my wounds."

The nautical phrases, unintelligible to ears unused to the sound of the sea, seemed to put fresh energy into the oars; they kept time together, the rhythm of the movement was still even and steady, but quite unlike the previous manner of rowing; it was as if a cantering horse had broken into a gallop. The gay company seated in the stern amused themselves by watching the brawny arms,

the tanned faces, and sparkling eyes of the rowers, the play of the tense muscles, the physical and mental forces that were being exerted to bring them for a trifling toll across the channel. So far from pitying the rowers' distress, they pointed out the men's faces to each other, and laughed at the grotesque expressions on the faces of the crew who were straining every muscle; but in the fore part of the boat the soldier, the peasant, and the old beggar woman watched the sailors with the sympathy naturally felt by toilers who live by the sweat of their brow and know the rough struggle, the strenuous excitement of effort. These folk, moreover, whose lives were spent in the open air, had all seen the warnings of danger in the sky, and their faces were grave. The young mother rocked her child, singing an old hymn of the Church for a lullaby.

"If we ever get there at all," the soldier remarked to the peasant, "it will be because the Almighty is bent on keeping us alive."

"Ah! He is the Master," said the old woman, "but I think it will be His good pleasure to take us to Himself. Just look at that light down there . . ." and she nodded her head as she spoke towards the sunset.

Streaks of fiery red glared from behind the masses of crimson-flushed brown cloud that seemed about to unloose a furious gale. There was a smothered murmur of the sea, a moaning sound that seemed to come from the depths, a low warning growl, such as a dog gives when he only means mischief as yet. After all, Ostend was not far away. Perhaps painting, like poetry, could not prolong the existence of the picture presented by sea and sky at that moment beyond the time of its actual duration. Art demands vehement contrasts, wherefore artists usually seek out Nature's most striking effects, doubtless because they despair of rendering the great and glorious charm of her daily moods; yet the human soul is often stirred as deeply by her calm as by her emotion, and by silence as by storm.

For a moment no one spoke on board the boat. Every one

watched that sea and sky, either with some presentiment of danger, or because they felt the influence of the religious melancholy that takes possession of nearly all of us at the close of the day, the hour of prayer, when all nature is hushed save for the voices of the bells. The sea gleamed pale and wan, but its hues changed, and the surface, took all the colors of steel. The sky was almost overspread with livid gray, but down in the west there were long narrow bars like streaks of blood; while lines of bright light in the eastern sky, sharp and clean as if drawn by the tip of a brush, were separated by folds of cloud, like the wrinkles on an old man's brow. The whole scene made a background of ashen grays and half-tints, in strong contrast to the bale-fires of the sunset. If written language might borrow of spoken language some of the bold figures of speech invented by the people, it might be said with the soldier that "the weather had been routed," or, as the peasant would say, "the sky glowered like an executioner." Suddenly a wind arose from the quarter of the sunset, and the skipper, who never took his eyes off the sea, saw the swell on the horizon line, and cried:

"Stop rowing!"

The sailors stopped immediately, and let their oars lie on the water.

"The skipper is right," said Thomas coolly. A great wave caught up the boat, carried it high on its crest, only to plunge it, as it were, into the trough of the sea that seemed to yawn for them. At this mighty upheaval, this sudden outbreak of the wrath of the sea, the company in the stern turned pale, and sent up a terrible cry.

"We are lost!"

"Oh, not yet!" said the skipper calmly.

As he spoke, the clouds immediately above their heads were torn asunder by the vehemence of the wind. The gray mass was rent and scattered east and west with ominous speed, a dim uncertain light from the rift in the sky fell full upon the boat, and the travelers beheld each other's faces. All of them, the noble and the wealthy, the sailors and the poor passengers

alike, were amazed for a moment by the appearance of the last comer. His golden hair, parted upon his calm, serene forehead, fell in thick curls about his shoulders; and his face, sublime in its sweetness and radiant with divine love, stood out against the surrounding gloom. He had no contempt for death; he knew that he should not die. But if at the first the company in the stern forgot for a moment the implacable fury of the storm that threatened their lives, selfishness and their habits of life soon prevailed again.

"How lucky that stupid burgomaster is, not to see the risks we are all running! He is just like a dog, he will die without a struggle," said the doctor.

He had scarcely pronounced this highly judicious dictum when the storm unloosed all its legions. The wind blew from every quarter of the heavens, the boat span round like a top, and the sea broke in.

"Oh! my poor child! My poor child! . . . Who will save my baby?" the mother cried in a heart-rending voice.

"You yourself will save it," the stranger said.

The thrilling tones of that voice went to the young mother's heart and brought hope with them; she heard the gracious words through all the whistling of the wind and the shrieks of the passengers.

"Holy Virgin of Good Help, who art at Antwerp, I promise thee a thousand pounds of wax and a statue, if thou wilt rescue me from this!" cried the burgher, kneeling upon his bags of gold.

"The Virgin is no more at Antwerp than she is here," was the doctor's comment on this appeal.

"She is in heaven," said a voice that seemed to come from the sea.

"Who said that?"

"'Tis the devil!" exclaimed the servant. "He is scoffing at the Virgin of Antwerp."

"Let us have no more of your Holy Virgin at present," the skipper cried to the passengers. "Put your hands to the scoops and bail the water out of the boat.—And the rest of you,"

he went on, addressing the sailors, "pull with all your might! Now is the time; in the name of the devil who is leaving you in this world, be your own Providence! Every one knows that the channel is fearfully dangerous; I have been to and fro across it these thirty years. Am I facing a storm for the first time to-night?"

He stood at the helm, and looked, as before, at his boat and at the sea and sky in turn.

"The skipper always laughs at everything," muttered Thomas.

"Will God leave us to perish along with those wretched creatures?" asked the haughty damsel of the handsome cavalier.

"No, no, noble maiden. . . . Listen!" and he caught her by the waist and said in her ear, "I can swim; say nothing about it! I will hold you by your fair hair and bring you safely to the shore; but I can only save you."

The girl looked at her aged mother. The lady was on her knees entreating absolution of the Bishop, who did not heed her. In the beautiful eyes the knight read a vague feeling of filial piety, and spoke in a smothered voice.

"Submit yourself to the will of God. If it His pleasure to take your mother to Himself, it will doubtless be for her happiness—in the other world," he added, and his voice dropped still lower. "And for ours in this," he thought within himself.

The Dame of Rupelmonde was lady of seven fiefs beside the barony of Gâvres.

The girl felt the longing for life in her heart, and for love that spoke through the handsome adventurer, a young miscreant who haunted churches in search of a prize, an heiress to marry, or ready money. The Bishop bestowed his benison on the waves, and bade them be calm; it was all that he could do. He thought of his concubine, and of the delicate feast with which she would welcome him; perhaps at that very moment she was bathing, perfuming herself, robing herself in velvet, fastening her necklace and her jeweled clasps, and

the perverse Bishop, so far from thinking of the power of Holy Church, of his duty to comfort Christians and exhort them to trust in God, that worldly regrets and lover's sighs mingled with the holy words of the breviary. By the dim light that shone on the pale faces of the company, it was possible to see their differing expressions as the boat was lifted high in air by a wave, to be cast back into the dark depths; the shallop quivered like a fragile leaf, the plaything of the north wind in the autumn; the hull creaked, it seemed ready to go to pieces. Fearful shrieks went up, followed by an awful silence.

There was a strange difference between the behavior of the folk in the bows and that of the rich or great people at the other end of the boat. The young mother clasped her infant tightly to her breast every time that a great wave threatened to engulf the fragile vessel; but she clung to the hope that the stranger's words had set in her heart. Each time that her eyes turned to his face she drew fresh faith at the sight, the strong faith of a helpless woman, a mother's faith. She lived by that divine promise, the loving words from his lips; the simple creature waited trustingly for them to be fulfilled, and scarcely feared the danger any longer.

The soldier, holding fast to the vessel's side, never took his eyes off the strange visitor. He copied on his own rough and swarthy features the imperturbability of the other's face, applying to this task the whole strength of a will and intelligence but little corrupted in the course of a life of mechanical and passive obedience. So emulous was he of a calm and tranquil courage greater than his own, that at last, perhaps unconsciously, something of that mysterious nature passed into his own soul. His admiration became an instinctive zeal for this man, a boundless love for and belief in him, such a love as soldiers feel for their leader when he has the power of swaying other men, when the halo of victories surrounds him, and the magical fascination of genius is felt in all that he does. The poor outcast was murmuring to herself:

"Ah! miserable wretch that I am! Have I not suffered

enough to expiate the sins of my youth? Ah! wretched woman, why did you leave the gay life of a frivolous Frenchwoman? why did you devour the goods of God with churchmen, the substance of the poor with extortioners and fleecers of the poor? Oh! I have sinned indeed!—Oh my God! my God! let me finish my time in hell here in this world of misery."

And again she cried, "Holy Virgin, Mother of God, have pity upon me!"

"Be comforted, mother. God is not a Lombard usurer. I may have killed people good and bad at random in my time, but I am not afraid of the resurrection."

"Ah! master lancepesade, how happy those fair ladies are, to be so near to a bishop, a holy man! They will get absolution for their sins," said the old woman. "Oh! if I could only hear a priest say to me, 'Thy sins are forgiven!' I should believe it then."

The stranger turned towards her, and the goodness in his face made her tremble.

"Have faith," he said, "and you will be saved."

"May God reward you, good sir," she answered. "If what you say is true, I will go on pilgrimage barefooted to Our Lady of Loretto to pray to her for you and for me."

The two peasants, father and son, were silent, patient, and submissive to the will of God, like folk whose wont it is to fall in instinctively with the ways of Nature like cattle. At the one end of the boat stood riches, pride, learning, debauchery, and crime—human society, such as art and thought and education and worldly interests and laws have made it; and at this end there was terror and wailing, innumerable different impulses all repressed by hideous doubts—at this end, and at this only, the agony of fear.

Above all these human lives stood a strong man, the skipper; no doubts assailed him, the chief, the king, the fatalist among them. He was trusting in himself rather than in Providence, crying, "Bail away!" instead of "Holy Virgin," defying the storm, in fact, and struggling with the sea like a wrestler.

But the helpless poor at the other end of the wherry! The mother rocking on her bosom the little one who smiled at the storm, the woman once so frivolous and gay, and now tormented with bitter remorse; the old soldier covered with scars, a mutilated life the sole reward of his unflagging loyalty and faithfulness. This veteran could scarcely count on the morsel of bread soaked in tears to keep the life in him, yet he was always ready to laugh, and went his way merrily, happy when he could drown his glory in the depths of a pot of beer, or could tell tales of the wars to the children who admired him, leaving his future with a light heart in the hands of God. Lastly, there were the two peasants, used to hardships and toil, labor incarnate, the labor by which the world lives. These simple folk were indifferent to thought and its treasures, ready to sink them all in a belief; and their faith was but so much the more vigorous because they had never disputed about it nor analyzed it. Such a nature is a virgin soil, conscience has not been tampered with, feeling is deep and strong; repentance, trouble, love, and work have developed, purified, concentrated, and increased their force of will a hundred times, the will—the one thing in man that resembles what learned doctors call the Soul.

The boat, guided by the well-nigh miraculous skill of the steersman, came almost within sight of Ostend, when, not fifty paces from the shore, she was suddenly struck by a heavy sea and capsized. The stranger with the light about his head spoke to this little world of drowning creatures:

"Those who have faith shall be saved; let them follow me!"

He stood upright, and walked with a firm step upon the waves. The young mother at once took her child in her arms, and followed at his side across the sea. The soldier too sprang up, saying in his homely fashion, "Ah! *nom d'un pipe!* I would follow *you* to the devil;" and without seeming astonished by it, he walked on the water. The old worn-out sinner, believing in the omnipotence of God, also followed the stranger.

The two peasants said to each other, "If they are walking

on the sea, why should we not do as they do?" and they also arose and hastened after the others. Thomas tried to follow, but his faith tottered; he sank in the sea more than once, and rose again, but the third time he also walked on the sea. The bold steersman clung like a remora to the wreck of his boat. The miser had had faith, and had risen to go, but he tried to take his gold with him, and it was his gold that dragged him down to the bottom. The learned man had scoffed at the charlatan and at the fools who listened to him; and when he heard the mysterious stranger propose to the passengers that they should walk on the waves, he began to laugh, and the ocean swallowed him. The girl was dragged down into the depths by her lover. The Bishop and the older lady went to the bottom, heavily laden with sins, it may be, but still more heavily laden with incredulity and confidence in idols, weighted down by devotion, into which alms-deeds and true religion entered but little.

The faithful flock, who walked with a firm step high and dry above the surge, heard all about them the dreadful whistling of the blast; great billows broke across their path, but an irresistible force cleft a way for them through the sea. These believing ones saw through the spray a dim speck of light flickering in the window of a fisherman's hut on the shore, and each one, as he pushed on bravely towards the light, seemed to hear the voice of his fellow crying, "Courage!" through all the roaring of the surf; yet no one had spoken a word—so absorbed was each by his own peril. In this way they reached the shore.

When they were all seated near the fisherman's fire, they looked round in vain for their guide with the light about him. The sea washed up the steersman at the base of the cliff on which the cottage stood; he was clinging with might and main to the plank as a sailor can cling when death stares him in the face; the MAN went down and rescued the almost exhausted seaman; then he said, as he held out a succoring hand above the man's head:

"Good, for this once; but do not try it again; the example would be too bad."

He took the skipper on his shoulders, and carried him to the fisherman's door; knocked for admittance for the exhausted man; then, when the door of the humble refuge opened, the Saviour disappeared.

The Convent of Mercy was built for sailors on this spot, where for long afterwards (so it was said) the footprints of Jesus Christ could be seen in the sand; but in 1793, at the time of the French invasion, the monks carried away this precious relic, that bore witness to the Saviour's last visit to earth.

There at the convent I found myself shortly after the Revolution of 1830. I was weary of life. If you had asked me the reason of my despair, I should have found it almost impossible to give it, so languid had grown the soul that was melted within me. The west wind had slackened the springs of my intelligence. A cold gray light poured down from the heavens, and the murky clouds that passed overhead gave a boding look to the land; all these things, together with the immensity of the sea, said to me, "Die to-day or die to-morrow, still must we not die?" And then——. I wandered on, musing on the doubtful future, on my blighted hopes. Gnawed by these gloomy thoughts, I turned mechanically into the convent church, with the gray towers that loomed like ghosts through the sea mists. I looked round with no kindling of the imagination at the forest of columns, at the slender arches set aloft upon the leafy capitals, a delicate labyrinth of sculpture. I walked with careless eyes along the side aisles that opened out before me like vast portals, ever turning upon their hinges. It was scarcely possible to see, by the dim light of the autumn day, the sculptured groinings of the roof, the delicate and clean-cut lines of the mouldings of the graceful pointed arches. The organ pipes were mute. There was no sound save the noise of my own footsteps to awaken the mournful echoes lurking in the dark chapels. I sat down at the base of one of the four pillars that supported the tower, near the choir. Thence I could see the whole of the building.

I gazed, and no ideas connected with it arose in my mind. I saw without seeing the mighty maze of pillars, the great rose windows that hung like a network suspended as by a miracle in air above the vast doorways. I saw the doors at the end of the side aisles, the aerial galleries, the stained glass windows framed in archways, divided by slender columns, fretted into flower forms and trefoil by fine filigree work of carved stone. A dome of glass at the end of the choir sparkled as if it had been built of precious stones set cunningly. In contrast to the roof with its alternating spaces of whiteness and color, the two aisles lay to right and left in shadow so deep that the faint gray outlines of their hundred shafts were scarcely visible in the gloom. I gazed at the marvelous arcades, the scroll-work, the garlands, the curving lines, and arabesques interwoven and interlaced, and strangely lighted, until by sheer dint of gazing my perceptions became confused, and I stood upon the borderland between illusion and reality, taken in the snare set for the eyes, and almost light-headed by reason of the multitudinous changes of he shapes about me.

Imperceptibly a mist gathered about the carven stone-work, and I only beheld it through a haze of fine golden dust, like the motes that hover in the bars of sunlight slanting through the air of a chamber. Suddenly the stone lacework of the rose windows gleamed through this vapor that had made all forms so shadowy. Every moulding, the edges of every carving, the least detail of the sculpture was dipped in silver. The sunlight kindled fires in the stained windows, their rich colors sent out glowing sparks of light. The shafts began to tremble, the capitals were gently shaken. A light shudder as of delight ran through the building, the stones were loosened in their setting, the wall-spaces swayed with graceful caution. Here and there a ponderous pier moved as solemnly as a dowager when she condescends to complete a quadrille at the close of a ball. A few slender and graceful columns, their heads adorned with wreaths of trefoil, began to laugh and dance here and there. Some of the pointed arches dashed at the tall lancet windows, who, like ladies of

the Middle Ages, wore the armorial bearings of their houses emblazoned on their golden robes. The dance of the mitred arcades with the slender windows became like a fray at a tourney.

In another moment every stone in the church vibrated, without leaving its place; for the organ-pipes spoke, and I heard divine music mingling with the songs of angels, an unearthly harmony, accompanied by the deep notes of the bells, that boomed as the giant towers rocked and swayed on their square bases. This strange Sabbath seemed to me the most natural thing in the world; and I, who had seen Charles X. hurled from his throne, was no longer amazed by anything. Nay, I myself was gently swaying with a see-saw movement that influenced my nerves pleasurably in a manner of which it is impossible to give any idea. Yet in the midst of this heated riot, the cathedral choir felt cold as if it were a winter day, and I became aware of a multitude of women, robed in white, silent, and impassive, sitting there. The sweet incense smoke that arose from the censers was grateful to my soul. The tall wax candles flickered. The lectern, gay as a chanter undone by the treachery of wine, was skipping about like a peal of Chinese bells.

Then I knew that the whole cathedral was whirling round so fast that everything appeared to be undisturbed. The colossal Figure on the crucifix above the altar smiled upon me with a mingled malice and benevolence that frightened me; I turned my eyes away, and marveled at the bluish vapor that slid across the pillars, lending to them an indescribable charm. Then some graceful women's forms began to stir on the friezes. The cherubs who upheld the heavy columns shook out their wings. I felt myself unlifted by some divine power that steeped me in infinite joy, in a sweet and languid rapture. I would have given my life, I think, to have prolonged these phantasmagoria for a little, but suddenly a shrill voice clamored in my ears:

"Awake and follow me!"

A withered woman took my hand in hers; its icy coldness

crept through every nerve. The bones of her face showed plainly through the sallow, almost olive-tinted wrinkles of the skin. The shrunken, ice-cold old woman wore a black robe, which she trailed in the dust, and at her throat there was something white, which I dared not examine. I could scarcely see her wan and colorless eyes, for they were fixed in a stare upon the heavens. She drew me after her along the aisles, leaving a trace of her presence in the ashes that she shook from her dress. Her bones rattled as she walked, like the bones of a skeleton; and as we went I heard behind me the tinkling of a little bell, a thin, sharp sound that rang through my head like the notes of a harmonica.

"Suffer!" she cried, "suffer! So it must be!"

We came out of the church; we went through the dirtiest streets of the town, till we came at last to a dingy dwelling, and she bade me enter in. She dragged me with her, calling to me in a harsh, tuneless voice like a cracked bell:

"Defend me! defend me!"

Together we went up a winding staircase. She knocked at a door in the darkness, and a mute, like some familiar of the Inquisition, opened to her. In another moment we stood in a room hung with ancient, ragged tapestry, amid piles of old linen, crumpled muslin, and gilded brass.

"Behold the wealth that shall endure for ever!" said she.

I shuddered with horror; for just then, by the light of a tall torch and two altar candles, I saw distinctly that this woman was fresh from the graveyard. She had no hair. I turned to fly. She raised her fleshless arm and encircled me with a band of iron set with spikes, and as she raised it a cry went up all about us, the cry of millions of voices—the shouting of the dead!

"It is my purpose to make thee happy for ever," she said. "Thou art my son."

We were sitting before the hearth, the ashes lay cold upon it; the old shrunken woman grasped my hand so tightly in hers that I could not choose but stay. I looked fixedly at her, striving to read the story of her life from the things

among which she was crouching. Had she indeed any life in her? It was a mystery. Yet I saw plainly that once she must have been young and beautiful; fair, with all the charm of simplicity, perfect as some Greek statue, with the brow of a vestal.

"Ah! ah!" I cried, "now I know thee! Miserable woman, why hast thou prostituted thyself? In the age of thy passions, in the time of thy prosperity, the grace and purity of thy youth were forgotten. Forgetful of thy heroic devotion, thy pure life, thy abundant faith, thou didst resign thy primitive power and thy spiritual supremacy for fleshly power. Thy linen vestments, thy couch of moss, the cell in the rock, bright with rays of the Light Divine, was forsaken; thou hast sparkled with diamonds, and shone with the glitter of luxury and pride. Then, grown bold and insolent, seizing and overturning all things in thy course like a courtesan eager for pleasure in her days of splendor, thou hast steeped thyself in blood like some queen stupefied by empery. Dost thou not remember to have been dull and heavy at times, and the sudden marvelous lucidity of other moments; as when Art emerges from an orgy? Oh! poet, painter, and singer, lover of splendid ceremonies and protector of the arts, was thy friendship for art perchance a caprice, that so thou shouldst sleep beneath magnificent canopies? Was there not a day when, in thy fantastic pride, though chastity and humility were prescribed to thee, thou hadst brought all things beneath thy feet, and set thy foot on the necks of princes; when earthly dominion, and wealth, and the mind of man bore thy yoke? Exulting in the abasement of humanity, joying to witness the uttermost lengths to which man's folly would go, thou hast bidden thy lovers walk on all fours, and required of them their lands and wealth, nay, even their wives if they were worth aught to thee. Thou hast devoured millions of men without a cause; thou hast flung away lives like sand blown by the wind from West to East. Thou hast come down from the heights

of thought to sit among the kings of men. Woman! instead of comforting men, thou hast tormented and afflicted them! Knowing that thou couldst ask and have, thou hast demanded —blood! A little flour surely should have contented thee, accustomed as thou hadst been to live on bread and to mingle water with thy wine. Unlike all others in all things, formerly thou wouldst bid they lovers fast, and they obeyed. Why should thy fancies have led thee to require things impossible? Why, like a courtesan spoiled by her lovers, hast thou doted on follies, and left those undeceived who sought to explain and justify all thy errors? Then came the days of thy later passions, terrible like the love of a woman of forty years, with a fierce cry thou hast sought to clasp the whole universe in one last embrace—and thy universe recoiled from thee!

"Then old men succeeded to thy young lovers; decrepitude came to thy feet and made thee hideous. Yet, even then, men with the eagle power of vision said to thee in a glance, 'Thou shalt perish ingloriously, because thou hast fallen away, because thou hast broken the vows of thy maidenhood. The angel with peace written on her forehead, who should have shed light and joy along her path, has been a Messalina, delighting in the circus, in debauchery, and abuse of power. The days of thy virginity cannot return; henceforward thou shalt be subject to a master. Thy hour has come; the hand of death is upon thee. Thy heirs believe that thou art rich; they will kill thee and find nothing. Yet try at least to fling away this raiment no longer in fashion; be once more as in the days of old!—Nay, thou art dead, and by thy own deed!'

"Is not this thy story?" so I ended. "Decrepit, toothless, shivering crone, now forgotten, going thy ways without so much as a glance from passers-by! Why art thou still alive? What doest thou in that beggar's garb, uncomely and desired of none? Where are thy riches?—for what were they spent? Where are thy treasures?—what great deeds hast thou done?"

At this demand, the shriveled woman raised her bony form, flung off her rags, and grew tall and radiant, smiling as she broke forth from the dark chrysalid sheath. Then like a butterfly, this diaphanous creature emerged, fair and youthful, clothed in white linen, an Indian from creation issuing her palms. Her golden hair rippled over her shoulders, her eyes glowed, a bright mist clung about her, a ring of gold hovered above her head, she shook the flaming blade of a sword towards the spaces of heaven.

"See and believe!" she cried.

And suddenly I saw, afar off, many thousands of cathedrals like the one that I had just quitted; but these were covered with pictures and with frescoes, and I heard them echo with entrancing music. Myriads of human creatures flocked to these great buildings, swarming about them like ants on an ant-heap. Some were eager to rescue books from oblivion or to copy manuscripts, other were helping the poor, but nearly all were studying. Up above this countless multitude rose giant statues that they had erected in their midst, and by the gleams of a strange light from some luminary as powerful as the sun, I read the inscriptions on the bases of the statues—Science, History, Literature.

The light died out. Again I faced the young girl. Gradually she slipped into the dreary sheath, into the ragged cere-cloths, and became an aged woman again. Her familiar brought her a little dust, and she stirred it into the ashes of her chafing-dish, for the weather was cold and stormy; and then he lighted for her, whose palaces had been lit with thousands of wax-tapers, a little cresset, that she might see to read her prayers through the hours of night.

"There is no faith left in the earth! . . ." she said.

In such a perilous plight did I behold the fairest and the greatest, the truest and most life-giving of all Powers.

"Wake up, sir, the doors are just about to be shut," said a hoarse voice. I turned and beheld the beadle's ugly

countenance; the man was shaking me by the arm, and the cathedral lay wrapped in shadows as a man is wrapped in his cloak.

"Belief," I said to myself, "is Life! I have just witnessed the funeral of a monarchy, now we must defend the church."

PARIS, *February* 1831.

MELMOTH RECONCILED

To Monsieur le Général Baron de Pommereul, a token of the friendship between our fathers, which survives in their sons.

DE BALZAC.

THERE is a special variety of human nature obtained in the Social Kingdom by a process analogous to that of the gardener's craft in the Vegetable Kingdom, to wit, by the forcing-house—a species of hybrid which can be raised neither from seed nor from slips. This product is known as the Cashier, an anthropomorphous growth, watered by religious doctrine, trained up in fear of the guillotine, pruned by vice, to flourish on a third floor with an estimable wife by his side and an uninteresting family. The number of cashiers in Paris must always be a problem for the physiologist. Has any one as yet been able to state correctly the terms of the proportion sum wherein the cashier figures as the unknown x? Where will you find the man who shall live with wealth, like a cat with a caged mouse? This man, for further qualification, shall be capable of sitting boxed in behind an iron grating for seven or eight hours a day during seven-eighths of the year, perched upon a cane-seated chair in a space as narrow as a lieutenant's cabin on board a man-of-war. Such a man must be able to defy anchylosis of the knee and thigh joints; he must have a soul above meanness, in order to live meanly; must lose all relish for money by dint of handling it. Demand this peculiar specimen of any creed, educational system, school, or institution you please, and select Paris, that city of fiery ordeals and branch establishment of hell, as the soil in which to plant the said cashier. So be it. Creeds, schools, institutions, and moral systems, all human rules and regulations, great and small, will, one

after another, present much the same face that an intimate friend turns upon you when you ask him to lend you a thousand francs. With a dolorous dropping of the jaw, they indicate the guillotine, much as your friend aforesaid will furnish you with the address of the money-lender, pointing you to one of the hundred gates by which a man comes to the last refuge of the destitute.

Yet nature has her freaks in the making of a man's mind; she indulges herself and makes a few honest folk now and again, and now and then a cashier.

Wherefore, that race of corsairs whom we dignify with the title of bankers, the gentry who take out a license for which they pay a thousand crowns, as the privateer takes out his letters of marque, hold these rare products of the incubations of virtue in such esteem that they confine them in cages in their counting-houses, much as governments procure and maintain specimens of strange beasts at their own charges.

If the cashier is possessed of an imagination or of a fervid temperament; if, as will sometimes happen to the most complete cashier, he loves his wife, and that wife grows tired of her lot, has ambitions, or merely some vanity in her composition, the cashier is undone. Search the chronicles of the counting-house. You will not find a single instance of a cashier attaining *a position,* as it is called. They are sent to the hulks; they go to foreign parts; they vegetate on a second floor in the Rue Saint-Louis among the market gardens of the Marais. Some day, when the cashiers of Paris come to a sense of their real value, a cashier will be hardly obtainable for money. Still, certain it is that there are people who are fit for nothing but to be cashiers, just as the bent of a certain order of mind inevitably makes for rascality. But, oh marvel of our civilization! Society rewards virtue with an income of a hundred louis in old age, a dwelling on a second floor, bread sufficient, occasional new bandana handkerchiefs, an elderly wife and her offspring.

So much for virtue. But for the opposite course, a little

boldness, a faculty for keeping on the windward side of the law, as Turenne outflanked Montecuculi, and Society will sanction the theft of millions, shower ribands upon the thief, cram him with honors, and smother him with consideration.

Government, moreover, works harmoniously with this profoundly illogical reasoner—Society. Government levies a conscription on the young intelligence of the kingdom at the age of seventeen or eighteen, a conscription of precocious power. Great ability is prematurely exhausted by excessive brain-work before it is sent up to be submitted to a process of selection. Nurserymen sort and select seeds in much the same way. To this process the Government brings professional appraisers of talent, men who can assay brains as experts assay gold at the Mint. Five hundred such heads, set afire with hope, are sent up annually by the most progressive portion of the population; and of these the Government takes one-third, puts them in sacks called the Écoles, and shakes them up together for three years. Though every one of these young plants represents vast productive power, they are made, as one may say, into cashiers. They receive appointments; the rank and file of engineers is made up of them; they are employed as captains of artillery; there is no (subaltern) grade to which they may not aspire. Finally, when these men, the pick of the youth of the nation, fattened on mathematics and stuffed with knowledge, have attained the age of fifty years, they have their reward, and receive as the price of their services the third-floor lodging, the wife and family, and all the comforts that sweeten life for mediocrity. If from among this race of dupes there should escape some five or six men of genius who climb the highest heights, is it not miraculous?

This is an exact statement of the relations between Talent and Probity on the one hand, and Government and Society on the other, in an age that considers itself to be progressive. Without this prefatory explanation a recent occurrence in Paris would seem improbable; but preceded by this summing up of the situation, it will perhaps receive some thoughtful

attention from minds capable of recognizing the real plague-spots of our civilization, a civilization which since 1815 has been moved by the spirit of gain rather than by principles of honor.

About five o'clock, on a dull autumn afternoon, the cashier of one of the largest banks in Paris was still at his desk, working by the light of a lamp that had been lit for some time. In accordance with the use and wont of commerce, the counting-house was in the darkest corner of the low-ceiled and far from spacious mezzanine floor, and at the very end of a passage lighted only by borrowed lights. The office doors along this corridor, each with its label, gave the place the look of a bath-house. At four o'clock the stolid porter had proclaimed, according to his orders, "The bank is closed." And by this time the departments were deserted, the letters despatched, the clerks had taken their leave. The wives of the partners in the firm were expecting their lovers; the two bankers dining with their mistresses. Everything was in order.

The place where the strong boxes had been bedded in sheet-iron was just behind the little sanctum, where the cashier was busy. Doubtless he was balancing his books. The open front gave a glimpse of a safe of hammered iron, so enormously heavy (thanks to the science of the modern inventor) that burglars could not carry it away. The door only opened at the pleasure of those who knew its password. The letter-lock was a warden who kept its own secret and could not be bribed; the mysterious word was an ingenious realization of the "Open sesame!" in the *Arabian Nights*. But even this was as nothing. A man might discover the password; but unless he knew the lock's final secret, the *ultima ratio* of this gold-guarding dragon of mechanical science, it discharged a blunderbuss at his head.

The door of the room, the walls of the room, the shutters of the windows in the room, the whole place, in fact, was lined with sheet-iron a third of an inch in thickness, con-

cealed behind the thin wooden paneling. The shutters had been closed, the door had been shut. If ever man could feel confident that he was absolutely alone, and that there was no remote possibility of being watched by prying eyes, that man was the cashier of the house of Nucingen and Company, in the Rue Saint-Lazare.

Accordingly the deepest silence prevailed in that iron cave. The fire had died out in the stove, but the room was full of that tepid warmth which produces the dull heavy-headedness and nauseous queasiness of a morning after an orgy. The stove is a mesmerist that plays no small part in the reduction of bank clerks and porters to a state of idiocy.

A room with a stove in it is a retort in which the power of strong men is evaporated, where their vitality is exhausted, and their wills enfeebled. Government offices are part of a great scheme for the manufacture of the mediocrity necessary for the maintenance of a Feudal System on a pecuniary basis —and money is the foundation of the Social Contract. (See *Les Employés.*) The mephitic vapors in the atmosphere of a crowded room contribute in no small degree to bring about a gradual deterioration of intelligences, the brain that gives off the largest quantity of nitrogen asphyxiates the others, in the long run.

The cashier was a man of five-and-forty or thereabouts. As he sat at the table, the light from a moderator lamp shining full on his bald head and glistening fringe of iron-gray hair that surrounded it—this baldness and the round outlines of his face made his head look very like a ball. His complexion was brick-red, a few wrinkles had gathered about his eyes, but he had the smooth, plump hands of a stout man. His blue cloth coat, a little rubbed and worn, and the creases and shininess of his trousers, traces of hard wear that the clothes-brush fails to remove, would impress a superficial observer with the idea that here was a thrifty and upright human being, sufficient of the philosopher or of the aristocrat to wear shabby clothes. But, unluckily, it is easy to find penny-wise people who will prove weak, wasteful, or incompetent in the capital things of life.

The cashier wore the ribbon of the Legion of Honor at his button-hole, for he had been a major of dragoons in the time of the Emperor. M. de Nucingen, who had been a contractor before he became a banker, had had reason in those days to know the honorable disposition of his cashier, who then occupied a high position. Reverses of fortune had befallen the major, and the banker out of regard for him paid his five hundred francs a month. The soldier had become a cashier in the year 1813, after his recovery from a wound received at Studzianka during the Retreat from Moscow, followed by six months of enforced idleness at Strasbourg, whither several officers had been transported by order of the Emperor, that they might receive skilled attention. This particular officer, Castanier by name, retired with the honorary grade of colonel, and a pension of two thousand four hundred francs.

In ten years' time the cashier had completely effaced the soldier, and Castanier inspired the banker with such trust in him, that he was associated in the transactions that went on in the private office behind his little counting-house. The baron himself had access to it by means of a secret staircase. There, matters of business were decided. It was the bolting-room where proposals were sifted; the privy council chamber where the reports of the money market were analyzed; circular notes issued thence; and finally, the private ledger and the journal which summarized the work of all the departments were kept there.

Castanier had gone himself to shut the door which opened on to a staircase that led to the parlor occupied by the two bankers on the first floor of their hôtel. This done, he had sat down at his desk again, and for a moment he gazed at a little collection of letters of credit drawn on the firm of Watschildine of London. Then he had taken up the pen and imitated the banker's signature upon each. *Nucingen* he wrote, and eyed the forged signatures critically to see which seemed the most perfect copy.

Suddenly he looked up as if a needle had pricked him.

"You are not alone!" a boding voice seemed to cry in his heart; and indeed the forger saw a man standing at the little grated window of the counting-house, a man whose breathing was so noiseless that he did not seem to breathe at all. Castanier looked, and saw that the door at the end of the passage was wide open; the stranger must have entered by that way.

For the first time in his life the old soldier felt a sensation of dread that made him stare open-mouthed and wide-eyed at the man before him; and for that matter, the appearance of the apparition was sufficiently alarming even if unaccompanied by the mysterious circumstances of so sudden an entry. The rounded forehead, the harsh coloring of the long oval face, indicated quite as plainly as the cut of his clothes that the man was an Englishman, reeking of his native isles. You had only to look at the collar of his overcoat, at the voluminous cravat which smothered the crushed frills of a shirt front so white that it brought out the changeless leaden hue of an impassive face, and the thin red line of the lips that seemed made to suck the blood of corpses; and you can guess at once at the black gaiters buttoned up to the knee, and the half-puritanical costume of a wealthy Englishman dressed for a walking excursion. The intolerable glitter of the stranger's eyes produced a vivid and unpleasant impression, which was only deepened by the rigid outlines of his features. The dried-up, emaciated creature seemed to carry within him some gnawing thought that consumed him and could not be appeased.

He must have digested his food so rapidly that he could doubtless eat continually without bringing any trace of color into his face or features. A tun of Tokay *vin de succession* would not have caused any faltering in that piercing glance that read men's inmost thoughts, nor dethroned the merciless reasoning faculty that always seemed to go to the bottom of things. There was something of the fell and tranquil majesty of a tiger about him.

"I have come to cash this bill of exchange, sir," he said.

Castanier felt the tones of his voice thrill through every nerve with a violent shock similar to that given by a discharge of electricity.

"The safe is closed," said Castanier.

"It is open," said the Englishman, looking round the counting-house. "To-morrow is Sunday, and I cannot wait. The amount is for five hundred thousand francs. You have the money there, and I must have it."

"But how did you come in, sir?"

The Englishman smiled. That smile frightened Castanier. No words could have replied more fully nor more peremptorily than that scornful and imperial curl of the stranger's lips. Castanier turned away, took up fifty packets, each containing ten thousand francs in bank-notes, and held them out to the stranger, receiving in exchange for them a bill accepted by the Baron de Nucingen. A sort of convulsive tremor ran through him as he saw a red gleam in the stranger's eyes when they fell on the forged signature on the letter of credit.

"It . . . it wants your signature . . ." stammered Castanier, handing back the bill.

"Hand me your pen," answered the Englishman.

Castanier handed him the pen with which he had just committed forgery. The stranger wrote *John Melmoth,* then he returned the slip of paper and the pen to the cashier. Castanier looked at the handwriting, noticing that it sloped from right to left in the Eastern fashion, and Melmoth disappeared so noiselessly that when Castanier looked up again an exclamation broke from him, partly because the man was no longer there, partly because he felt a strange painful sensation such as our imagination might take for an effect of poison.

The pen that Melmoth had handled sent the same sickening heat through him that an emetic produces. But it seemed impossible to Castanier that the Englishman should have guessed his crime. His inward qualms he attributed to the palpitation of the heart that, according to received

ideas, was sure to follow at once on such a "turn" as the stranger had given him.

"The devil take it; I am very stupid. Providence is watching over me; for if that brute had come round to see my gentlemen to-morrow, my goose would have been cooked!" said Castanier, and he burned the unsuccessful attempts at forgery in the stove.

He put the bill that he meant to take with him in an enevlope, and helped himself to five hundred thousand francs in French and English bank-notes from the safe, which he locked. Then he put everything in order, lit a candle, blew out the lamp, took up his hat and umbrella, and went out sedately, as usual, to leave one of the two keys of the strong room with Madame de Nucingen, in the absence of her husband the Baron.

"You are in luck, M. Castanier," said the banker's wife as he entered her room; "we have a holiday on Monday; you can go into the country, or to Soizy."

"Madame, will you be so good as to tell your husband that the bill of exchange on Watschildine, which was behind time, has just been presented? The five hundred thousand francs have been paid; so I shall not come back till noon on Tuesday."

"Good-bye, monsieur; I hope you will have a pleasant time."

"The same to you, madame," replied the old dragoon as he went out. He glanced as he spoke at a young man well known in fashionable society at that time, a M. de Rastignac, who was regarded as Madame de Nucingen's lover.

"Madame," remarked this latter, "the old boy looks to me as if he meant to play you some ill turn."

"Pshaw! impossible; he is too stupid."

"Piquoizeau," said the cashier, walking into the porter's room, "what made you let anybody come up after four o'clock?"

"I have been smoking a pipe here in the doorway ever since

four o'clock," said the man, "and nobody has gone into the bank. Nobody has come out either except the gentlemen——"

"Are you quite sure?"

"Yes, upon my word and honor. Stay, though, at four o'clock M. Werbrust's friend came, a young fellow from Messrs. du Tillet & Co., in the Rue Joubert."

"All right," said Castanier, and he hurried away.

The sickening sensation of heat that he had felt when he took back the pen returned in greater intensity. *"Mille diables!"* thought he, as he threaded his way along the Boulevard de Gand, "haven't I taken proper precautions? Let me think! Two clear days, Sunday and Monday, then a day of uncertainty before they begin to look for me; altogether, three days and four nights' respite. I have a couple of passports and two different disguises; is not that enough to throw the cleverest detective off the scent? On Tuesday morning I shall draw a million francs in London before the slightest suspicion has been aroused. My debts I am leaving behind for the benefit of my creditors, who will put a 'P'* on the bills, and I shall live comfortably in Italy for the rest of my days as the Conte Ferraro. I was alone with him when he died, poor fellow, in the marsh of Zembin, and I shall slip into his skin. . . . *Mille diables!* the woman who is to follow after me might give them a clue! Think of an old campaigner like me infatuated enough to tie myself to a petticoat tail! . . . Why take her? I must leave her behind. Yes, I could make up my mind to it; but—I know myself—I should be ass enough to go back to her. Still, nobody knows Aquilina. Shall I take her or leave her?"

"You will not take her!" cried a voice that filled Castanier with sickening dread. He turned sharply, and saw the Englishman.

"The devil is in it!" cried the cashier aloud.

Melmoth had passed his victim by this time; and if Castanier's first impulse had been to fasten a quarrel on a

* Protested.

man who read his own thoughts, he was so much torn up by opposing feelings that the immediate result was a temporary paralysis. When he resumed his walk he fell once more into that fever of irresolution which besets those who are so carried away by passion that they are ready to commit a crime, but have not sufficient strength of character to keep it to themselves without suffering terribly in the process. So, although Castanier had made up his mind to reap the fruits of a crime which was already half executed, he hesitated to carry out his designs. For him, as for many men of mixed character in whom weakness and strength are equally blended, the least trifling consideration determines whether they shall continue to lead blameless lives or become actively criminal. In the vast masses of men enrolled in Napoleon's armies there were many who, like Castanier, possessed the purely physical courage demanded on the battlefield, yet lacked the moral courage which makes a man as great in crime as he could have been in virtue.

The letter of credit was drafted in such terms that immediately on his arrival he might draw twenty-five thousand pounds on the firm of Watschildine, the London correspondents of the house of Nucingen. The London house had been already advised of the draft about to be made upon them; he had written to them himself. He had instructed an agent (chosen at random) to take his passage in a vessel which was to leave Portsmouth with a wealthy English family on board, who were going to Italy, and the passage-money had been paid in the name of the Conte Ferraro. The smallest details of the scheme had been thought out. He had arranged matters so as to divert the search that would be made for him into Belgium and Switzerland, while he himself was at sea in the English vessel. Then, by the time that Nucingen might flatter himself that he was on the track of his late cashier, the said cashier, as the Conte Farraro, hoped to be safe in Naples. He had determined to disfigure his face in order to disguise himself the more completely, and by means of an acid to imitate the

scars of smallpox. Yet, in spite of all these precautions, which surely seemed as if they must secure him complete immunity, his conscience tormented him; he was afraid. The even and peaceful life that he had led for so long had modified the morality of the camp. His life was stainless as yet; he could not sully it without a pang. So for the last time he abandoned himself to all the influences of the better self that strenuously resisted.

"Pshaw!" he said at last, at the corner of the Boulevard and the Rue Montmartre, "I will take a cab after the play this evening and go out to Versailles. A post-chaise will be ready for me at my old quartermaster's place. He would keep my secret even if a dozen men were standing ready to shoot him down. The chances are all in my favor, so far as I see; so I shall take my little Naqui with me, and I will go."

"You will not go!" exclaimed the Englishman, and the strange tones of his voice drove all the cashier's blood back to his heart.

Melmoth stepped into a tilbury which was waiting for him, and was whirled away so quickly, that when Castanier looked up he saw his foe some hundred paces away from him, and before it even crossed his mind to cut off the man's retreat the tilbury was far on its way up the Boulevard Montmartre.

"Well, upon my word, there is something supernatural about this!" said he to himself. "If I were fool enough to believe in God, I should think that He had set Saint Michael on my tracks. Suppose that the devil and the police should let me go on as I please, so as to nab me in the nick of time? Did any one ever see the like! But there, this is folly . . ."

Castanier went along the Rue du Faubourg-Montmartre, slackening his pace as he neared the Rue Richer. There on the second floor of a block of buildings which looked out upon some gardens, lived the unconscious cause of Castanier's crime—a young woman known in the quarter as Mme. de la Garde. A concise history of certain events in the cashier's

past life must be given in order to explain these facts, and to give a complete presentment of the crisis when he yielded to temptation.

Mme. de la Garde said that she was a Piedmontese. No one, not even Castanier, knew her real name. She was one of those young girls, who are driven by dire misery, by inability to earn a living, or by fear of starvation, to have recourse to a trade which most of them loathe, many regard with indifference, and some few follow in obedience to the laws of their constitution. But on the brink of the gulf of prostitution in Paris, the young girl of sixteen, beautiful and pure as the Madonna, had met with Castanier. The old dragoon was too rough and homely to make his way in society, and he was tired of tramping the boulevard at night and of the kind of conquests made there by gold. For some time past he had desired to bring a certain regularity into an irregular life. He was struck by the beauty of the poor child who had drifted by chance into his arms, and his determination to rescue her from the life of the streets was half benevolent, half selfish, as some of the thoughts of the best of men are apt to be. Social conditions mingle elements of evil with the promptings of natural goodness of heart, and the mixture of motives underlying a man's intentions should be leniently judged. Castanier had just cleverness enough to be very shrewd where his own interests were concerned. So he concluded to be a philanthropist on either count, and at first made her his mistress.

"Hey! hey!" he said to himself, in his soldierly fashion. "I am an old wolf, and a sheep shall not make a fool of me. Castanier, old man, before you set up housekeeping, reconnoitre the girl's character for a bit, and see if she is a steady sort."

This irregular union gave the Piedmontese a status the most nearly approaching respectability among those which the world declines to recognize. During the first year she took the *nom de guerre* of Aquilina, one of the characters in *Venice Preserved* which she had chanced to read. She

fancied that she resembled the courtesan in face and general appearance, and in a certain precocity of heart and brain of which she was conscious. When Castanier found that her life was as well regulated and virtuous as was possible for a social outlaw, he manifested a desire that they should live as husband and wife. So she took the name of Mme. de la Garde, in order to approach, as closely as Parisian usages permit, the conditions of a real marriage. As a matter of fact, many of these unfortunate girls have one fixed idea, to be looked upon as respectable middle-class women, who lead humdrum lives of faithfulness to their husbands; women who would make excellent mothers, keepers of household accounts, and menders of household linen. This longing springs from a sentiment so laudable, that society should take it into consideration. But society, incorrigible as ever, will assuredly persist in regarding the married woman as a corvette duly authorized by her flag and papers to go on her own course, while the woman who is a wife in all but name is a pirate and an outlaw for lack of a document. A day came when Mme. de la Garde would fain have signed herself "Mme. Castanier." The cashier was put out by this.

"So you do not love me well enough to marry me?" she said.

Castanier did not answer; he was absorbed by his thoughts. The poor girl resigned herself to her fate. The ex-dragoon was in despair. Naqui's heart softened towards him at the sight of his trouble; she tried to soothe him, but what could she do when she did not know what ailed him? When Naqui made up her mind to know the secret, although she never asked him a question, the cashier dolefully confessed to the existence of a Mme. Castanier. This lawful wife, a thousand times accursed, was living in a humble way in Strasbourg on a small property there; he wrote to her twice a year, and kept the secret of her existence so well, that no one suspected that he was married. The reason of this reticence? If it is familiar to many military men who may chance to be in a like predicament, it is perhaps worth while to give the story.

Your genuine trooper (if it is allowable here to employ the word which in the army signifies a man who is destined to die as a captain) is a sort of serf, a part and parcel of his regiment, an essentially simple creature, and Castanier was marked out by nature as a victim to the wiles of mothers with grown-up daughters left too long on their hands. It was at Nancy, during one of those brief intervals of repose when the Imperial armies were not on active service abroad, that Castanier was so unlucky as to pay some attention to a young lady with whom he danced at a *ridotto,* the provincial name for the entertainments often given by the military to the townsfolk, or *vice versâ,* in garrison towns. A scheme for inveigling the gallant captain into matrimony was immediately set on foot, one of those schemes by which mothers secure accomplices in a human heart by touching all its motive springs, while they convert all their friends into fellow-conspirators. Like all people possessed by one idea, these ladies press everything into the service of their great project, slowly elaborating their toils, much as the ant-lion excavates its funnel in the sand and lies in wait at the bottom for its victim. Suppose that no one strays, after all, into that carefully constructed labyrinth? Suppose that the ant-lion dies of hunger and thirst in her pit? Such things may be, but if any heedless creature once enters in, it never comes out. All the wires which could be pulled to induce action on the captain's part were tried; appeals were made to the secret interested motives that always come into play in such cases; they worked on Castanier's hopes and on the weaknesses and vanity of human nature. Unluckily, he had praised the daughter to her mother when he brought her back after a waltz, a little chat followed, and then an invitation in the most natural way in the world. Once introduced into the house, the dragoon was dazzled by the hospitality of a family who appeared to conceal their real wealth beneath a show of careful economy. He was skilfully flattered on all sides, and every one extolled for his benefit the various treasures there displayed. A neatly timed dinner, served

on plate lent by an uncle, the attention shown to him by the only daughter of the house, the gossip of the town, a well-to-do sub-lieutenant who seemed likely to cut the ground from under his feet—all the innumerable snares, in short, of the provincial ant-lion were set for him, and to such good purpose, that Castanier said five years later, "To this day I do not know how it came about!"

The dragoon received fifteen thousand francs with the lady, who, after two years of marriage, became the ugliest and consequently the most peevish woman on earth. Luckily they had no children. The fair complexion (maintained by a Spartan regimen), the fresh, bright color in her face, which spoke of an engaging modesty, became overspread with blotches and pimples; her figure, which had seemed so straight, grew crooked, the angel became a suspicious and shrewish creature who drove Castanier frantic. Then the fortune took to itself wings. At length the dragoon, no longer recognizing the woman whom he had wedded, left her to live on a little property at Strasbourg, until the time when it should please God to remove her to adorn Paradise. She was one of those virtuous women who, for want of other occupation, would weary the life out of an angel with complainings, who pray till (if their prayers are heard in heaven) they must exhaust the patience of the Almighty, and say everything that is bad of their husbands in dovelike murmurs over a game of boston with their neighbors. When Aquilina learned all these troubles she clung still more affectionately to Castanier, and made him so happy, varying with woman's ingenuity the pleasures with which she filled his life, that all unwittingly she was the cause of the cashier's downfall.

Like many women who seem by nature destined to sound all the depths of love, Mme. de la Garde was disinterested. She asked neither for gold nor for jewelry, gave no thought to the future, lived entirely for the present and for the pleasures of the present. She accepted expensive ornaments and dresses, the carriage so eagerly coveted by women of her class, as one harmony the more in the picture of life. There

was absolutely no vanity in her desire not to appear at a better advantage but to look the fairer, and, moreover, no woman could live without luxuries more cheerfully. When a man of generous nature (and military men are mostly of this stamp) meets with such a woman, he feels a sort of exasperation at finding himself her debtor in generosity. He feels that he could stop a mail coach to obtain money for her if he has not sufficient for her whims. He will commit a crime if so he may be great and noble in the eyes of some woman or of his special public; such is the nature of the man. Such a lover is like a gambler who would be dishonored in his own eyes if he did not repay the sum he borrowed from a waiter in a gaming-house; but will shrink from no crime, will leave his wife and children without a penny, and rob and murder, if so he may come to the gaming-table with a full purse, and his honor remain untarnished among the frequenters of that fatal abode. So it was with Castanier.

He had begun by installing Aquilina in a modest fourth-floor dwelling, the furniture being of the simplest kind. But when he saw the girl's beauty and great qualities, when he had known inexpressible and unlooked-for happiness with her, he began to dote upon her; and longed to adorn his idol. Then Aquilina's toilette was so comically out of keeping with her poor abode, that for both their sakes it was clearly incumbent on him to move. The change swallowed up almost all Castanier's savings, for he furnished his domestic paradise with all the prodigality that is lavished on a kept mistress. A pretty women must have everything pretty about her; the unity of charm in the woman and her surroundings singles her out from among her sex. This sentiment of homogeneity indeed, though it has frequently escaped the attention of observers, is instinctive in human nature; and the same prompting leads elderly spinsters to surround themselves with dreary relics of the past. But the lovely Piedmontese must have the newest and latest fashions, and all that was daintiest and prettiest in stuffs for hangings, in silks or jewelry, in fine china and other brittle and fragile

wares. She asked for nothing; but when she was called upon to make a choice, when Castanier asked her, "Which do you like?" she would answer, "Why, this is the nicest!" Love never counts the cost, and Castanier therefore always took the "nicest."

When once the standard had been set up, there was nothing for it but everything in the household must be in conformity, from the linen, plate, and crystal through a thousand and one items of expenditure down to the pots and pans in the kitchen. Castanier had meant to "do things simply," as the saying goes, but he gradually found himself more and more in debt. One expense entailed another. The clock called for candle sconces. Fires must be lighted in the ornamental grates, but the curtains and hangings were too fresh and delicate to be soiled by smuts, so they must be replaced by patent and elaborate fireplaces, warranted to give out no smoke, recent inventions of the people who are clever at drawing up a prospectus. Then Aquilina found it so nice to run about barefooted on the carpet in her room, that Castanier must have soft carpets laid everywhere for the pleasure of playing with Naqui. A bathroom, too, was built for her, everything to the end that she might be more comfortable.

Shopkeepers, workmen, and manufacturers in Paris have a mysterious knack of enlarging a hole in a man's purse. They cannot give the price of anything upon inquiry; and as the paroxysm of longing cannot abide delay, orders are given by the feeble light of an approximate estimate of cost. The same people never send in the bills at once, but ply the purchaser with furniture till his head spins. Everything is so pretty, so charming; and every one is satisfied.

A few months later the obliging furniture dealers are metamorphosed, and reappear in the shape of alarming totals on invoices that fill the soul with their horrid clamor; they are in urgent want of the money; they are, as you may say, on the brink of bankruptcy, their tears flow, it is heart-rending to hear them! And then——the gulf yawns, and gives up serried columns of figures marching four deep,

when as a matter of fact they should have issued innocently three by three.

Before Castanier had any idea of how much he had spent, he had arranged for Aquilina to have a carriage from a livery stable when she went out, instead of a cab. Castanier was a gourmand; he engaged an excellent cook; and Aquilina, to please him, had herself made the purchases of early fruit and vegetables, rare delicacies, and exquisite wines. But, as Aquilina had nothing of her own, these gifts of hers, so precious by reason of the thought and tact and graciousness that prompted them, were no less a drain upon Castanier's purse; he did not like his Naqui to be without money, and Naqui could not keep money in her pocket. So the table was a heavy item of expenditure for a man with Castanier's income. The ex-dragoon was compelled to resort to various shifts for obtaining money, for he could not bring himself to renounce this delightful life. He loved the woman too well to cross the freaks of the mistress. He was one of those men who, through self-love or through weakness of character, can refuse nothing to a woman; false shame overpowers them, and they rather face ruin than make the admissions: "I cannot——" "My means will not permit——" "I cannot afford——"

When, therefore, Castanier saw that if he meant to emerge from the abyss of debt into which he had plunged, he must part with Aquilina and live upon bread and water, he was so unable to do without her or to change his habits of life, that daily he put off his plans of reform until the morrow. The debts were pressing, and he began by borrowing money. His position and previous character inspired confidence, and of this he took advantage to devise a system of borrowing money as he required it. Then, as the total amount of debt rapidly increased, he had recourse to those commercial inventions known as *accommodation bills*. This form of bill does not represent goods or other value received, and the first endorser pays the amount named for the obliging person who accepts it. This species of fraud is tolerated because it

it impossible to detect it, and, moreover, it is an imaginary fraud which only becomes real if payment is ultimately refused.

When at length it was evidently impossible to borrow any longer, whether because the amount of the debt was now so greatly increased, or because Castanier was unable to pay the large amount of interest on the aforesaid sums of money, the cashier saw bankruptcy before him. On making this discovery, he decided for a fraudulent bankruptcy rather than an ordinary failure, and preferred a crime to a misdemeanor. He determined, after the fashion of the celebrated cashier of the Royal Treasury, to abuse the trust deservedly won, and to increase the number of his creditors by making a final loan of the sum sufficient to keep him in comfort in a foreign country for the rest of his days. All this, as has been seen, he had prepared to do.

Aquilina knew nothing of the irksome cares of this life; she enjoyed her existence, as many a woman does, making no inquiry as to where the money came from, even as sundry other folk will eat their buttered rolls untroubled by any restless spirit of curiosity as to the culture and growth of wheat; but as the labor and miscalculations of agriculture lie on the other side of the baker's oven, so beneath the unappreciated luxury of many a Parisian household lie intolerable anxieties and exorbitant toil.

While Castanier was enduring the torture of the strain, and his thoughts were full of the deed that should change his whole life, Aquilina was lying luxuriously back in a great armchair by the fireside, beguiling the time by chatting with her waiting-maid. As frequently happens in such cases the maid had become the mistress' confidante, Jenny having first assured herself that her mistress' ascendency over Castanier was complete.

"What are we to do this evening? Léon seems determined to come," Mme. de la Garde was saying, as she read a passionate epistle indited upon a faint gray notepaper.

"Here is the master!" said Jenny.

Castanier came in. Aquilina, nowise disconcerted, crumpled up the letter, took it with the tongs, and held it in the flames.

"So that is what you do with your love-letters, it is?" asked Castanier.

"Oh goodness, yes," said Aquilina; "is it not the best way of keeping them safe? Besides, fire should go to the fire, as water makes for the river."

"You are talking as if it were a real love-letter, Naqui——"

"Well, am I not handsome enough to receive them?" she said, holding up her forehead for a kiss. There was a carelessness in her manner that would have told any man less blind than Castanier that it was only a piece of conjugal duty, as it were, to give this joy to the cashier; but use and wont had brought Castanier to the point where clear-sightedness is no longer possible for love.

"I have taken a box at the Gymnase this evening," he said; "let us have dinner early, and then we need not dine in a hurry."

"Go and take Jenny. I am tired of plays. I do not know what is the matter with me this evening; I would rather stay here by the fire."

"Come, all the same though, Naqui; I shall not be here to bore you much longer. Yes, Quiqui, I am going to start to-night, and it will be some time before I come back again. I am leaving everything in your charge. Will you keep your heart for me too?"

"Neither my heart nor anything else," she said; "but when you come back again, Naqui will still be Naqui for you."

"Well, this is frankness. So you would not follow me?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Eh! why, how can I leave the lover who writes me such sweet little notes?" she asked, pointing to the blackened scrap of paper with a mocking smile.

"Is there any truth in it?" asked Castanier. "Have you really a lover?"

"Really!" cried Aquilina; "and have you never given it a serious thought, dear? To begin with, you are fifty years old. Then you have just the sort of face to put on a fruit stall; if the woman tried to sell you for a pumpkin, no one would contradict her. You puff and blow like a seal when you come upstairs; your paunch rises and falls like a diamond on a woman's forehead! It is pretty plain that you served in the dragoons; you are a very ugly-looking old man. Fiddle-de-dee. If you have any mind to keep my respect, I recommend you not to add imbecility to these qualities by imagining that such a girl as I am will be content with your asthmatic love, and not look for youth and good looks and pleasure by way of a variety——"

"Aquilina! you are laughing, of course?"

"Oh, very well; and are you not laughing too? Do you take me for a fool, telling me that you are going away? 'I am going to start to-night!' she said, mimicking his tones. Stuff and nonsense! Would you talk like that if you were really going from your Naqui? You would cry, like the booby that you are!"

"After all, if I go, will you follow?" he asked.

"Tell me first whether this journey of yours is a bad joke on not."

"Yes, seriously, I am going."

"Well, then, seriously, I shall stay. A pleasant journey to you, my boy! I will wait till you come back. I would sooner take leave of life than take leave of my dear, cozy Paris——"

"Will you not come to Italy, to Naples, and lead a pleasant life there—a delicious, luxurious life, with this stout old fogey of yours, who puffs and blows like a seal?"

"No."

"Ungrateful girl!"

"Ungrateful?" she cried, rising to her feet. "I might leave this house this moment and take nothing out of it but

myself. I shall have given you all the treasures a young girl can give, and something that not every drop in your veins and mine can ever give me back. If, by any means whatever, by selling my hopes of eternity, for instance, I could recover my past self, body as soul (for I have, perhaps, redeemed my soul), and be pure as a lily for my lover, I would not hesitate a moment! What sort of devotion has rewarded mine? You have housed and fed me, just as you give a dog food and a kennel because he is a protection to the house, and he may take kicks when we are out of humor, and lick our hands as soon as we are pleased to call to him. And which of us two will have been the more generous?"

"Oh! dear child, do you not see that I am joking?" returned Castanier. "I am going on a short journey; I shall not be away for very long. But come with me to the Gymnase; I shall start just before midnight, after I have had time to say good-bye to you."

"Poor pet! so you are really going, are you?" she said. She put her arms round his neck, and drew down his head against her bodice.

"You are smothering me!" cried Castanier, with his face buried in Aquilina's breast. That damsel turned to say in Jenny's ear, "Go to Léon, and tell him not to come till one o'clock. If you do not find him, and he comes here during the leave-taking, keep him in your room.—Well," she went on, setting free Castanier, and giving a tweak to the tip of his nose, "never mind, handsomest of seals that you are. I will go to the theatre with you this evening! But all in good time; let us have dinner! There is a nice little dinner for you—just what you like."

"It is very hard to part from such a woman as you!" exclaimed Castanier.

"Very well then, why do you go?" asked she.

"Ah! why? why? If I were to begin to explain the reasons why, I must tell you things that would prove to you that I love you almost to madness. Ah! if you have sacrificed your honor for me, I have sold mine for you; we are quits. Is that love?"

"What is all this about?" said she. "Come, now, promise me that if I had a lover would you still love me as a father; that would be love! Come, now, promise it at once, and give us your fist upon it."

"I should kill you," and Castanier smiled as he spoke.

They sat down to the dinner table, and went thence to the Gymnase. When the first part of the performance was over, it occurred to Castanier to show himself to some of his acquaintances in the house, so as to turn away any suspicion of his departure. He left Mme. de la Garde in the corner box where she was seated, according to her modest wont, and went to walk up and down in the lobby. He had not gone many paces before he saw the Englishman, and with a sudden return of the sickening sensation of heat that once before had vibrated through him, and of the terror that he had felt already, he stood face to face with Melmoth.

"Forger!"

At the word, Castanier glanced round at the people who were moving about them. He fancied that he could see astonishment and curiosity in their eyes, and wishing to be rid of this Englishman at once, he raised his hand to strike him—and felt his arm paralyzed by some invisible power that sapped his strength and nailed him to the spot. He allowed the stranger to take him by the arm, and they walked together to the green-room like two friends.

"Who is strong enough to resist me?" said the Englishman, addressing him. "Do you not know that everything here on earth must obey me, that it is in my power to do everything? I read men's thoughts, I see the future, and I know the past. I am here, and I can be elsewhere also. Time and space and distance are nothing to me. The whole world is at my beck and call. I have the power of continual enjoyment and of giving joy. I can see through walls, discover hidden treasures, and fill my hands with them. Palaces arise at my nod, and my architect makes no mistakes. I can make all lands break forth into blossom, heap up their gold and precious stones, and surround myself with fair women

and ever new faces; everything is yielded up to my will. I could gamble on the Stock Exchange, and my speculations would be infallible; but a man who can find the hoards that misers have hidden in the earth need not trouble himself about stocks. Feel the strength of the hand that grasps you; poor wretch, doomed to shame! Try to bend the arm of iron! try to soften the adamantine heart! Fly from me if you dare! You would hear my voice in the depths of the caves that lie under the Seine; you might hide in the Catacombs, but would you not see me there? My voice could be heard through the sound of the thunder, my eyes shine as brightly as the sun, for I am the peer of Lucifer!"

Castanier heard the terrible words, and felt no protest nor contradiction within himself. He walked side by side with the Englishman, and had no power to leave him.

"You are mine; you have just committed a crime. I have found at last the mate whom I have sought. Have you a mind to learn your destiny? Aha! you came here to see a play, and you shall see a play—nay, two. Come. Present me to Mme. de la Garde as one of your best friends. Am I not your last hope of escape?"

Castanier, followed by the stranger, returned to his box; and in accordance with the order he had just received, he hastened to introduce Melmoth to Mme. de la Garde. Aquilina seemed to be not in the least surprised. The Englishman declined to take a seat in front, and Castanier was once more beside his mistress; the man's slightest wish must be obeyed. The last piece was about to begin, for, at that time, small theatres only gave three pieces. One of the actors had made the Gymnase the fashion, and that evening Perlet (the actor in question) was to play in a vaudeville called the *Le Comédien d'Étampes,* in which he filled four different parts.

When the curtain rose, the stranger stretched out his hand over the crowded house. Castanier's cry of terror died away, for the walls of his throat seemed glued together as Melmoth pointed to the stage, and the cashier knew that the play had been changed at the Englishman's desire.

He saw the strong-room at the bank; he saw the Baron de Nucingen in conference with a police-officer from the Prefecture, who was informing him of Castanier's conduct, explaining that the cashier had absconded with money taken from the safe, giving the history of the forged signature. The information was put in writing; the document signed and duly despatched to the Public Prosecutor.

"Are we in time, do you think?" asked Nucingen.

"Yes," said the agent of police; "he is at the Gymnase, and has no suspicion of anything."

Castanier fidgeted on his chair, and made as if he would leave the theatre, but Melmoth's hand lay on his shoulder, and he was obliged to sit and watch; the hideous power of the man produced an effect like that of nightmare, and he could not move a limb. Nay, the man himself was the nightmare; his presence weighed heavily on his victim like a poisoned atmosphere. When the wretched cashier turned to implore the Englishman's mercy, he met those blazing eyes that discharged electric currents, which pierced through him and transfixed him like darts of steel.

"What have I done to you?" he said, in his prostrate helplessness, and he breathed hard like a stag at the water's edge. "What do you want of me?"

"Look!" cried Melmoth.

Castanier looked at the stage. The scene had been changed. The play seemed to be over, and Castanier beheld himself stepping from the carriage with Aquilina; but as he entered the courtyard of the house in the Rue Richer, the scene again was suddenly changed, and he saw his own house. Jenny was chatting by the fire in her mistress' room with a subaltern officer of a line regiment then stationed at Paris.

"He is going, is he?" said the sergeant, who seemed to belong to a family in easy circumstances; "I can be happy at my ease! I love Aquilina too well to allow her to belong to that old toad! I, myself, am going to marry Mme. de la Garde!" cried the sergeant.

"Old toad!" Castanier murmured piteously.

"Here come the master and mistress; hide yourself! Stay, get in here, Monsieur Léon," said Jenny. "The master won't stay here for very long."

Castanier watched the sergeant hide himself among Aquilina's gowns in her dressing-room. Almost immediately he himself appeared upon the scene, and took leave of his mistress, who made fun of him in "asides" to Jenny, while she uttered the sweetest and tenderest words in his ears. She wept with one side of her face, and laughed with the other. The audience called for an encore.

"Accursed creature!" cried Castanier from his box.

Aquilina was laughing till the tears came into her eyes.

"Goodness!" she cried, "how funny Perlet is as the Englishwoman! . . . Why don't you laugh? Every one else in the house is laughing. Laugh, dear!" she said to Castanier.

Melmoth burst out laughing, and the unhappy cashier shuddered. The Englishman's laughter wrung his heart and tortured his brain; it was as if a surgeon had bored his skull with a red-hot iron.

"Laughing! are they laughing!" stammered Castanier.

He did not see the prim English lady whom Perlet was acting with such ludicrous effect, nor hear the English-French that had filled the house with roars of laughter; instead of all this, he beheld himself hurrying from the Rue Richer, hailing a cab on the Boulevard, bargaining with the man to take him to Versailles. Then once more the scene changed. He recognized the sorry inn at the corner of the Rue de l'Orangerie and the Rue des Récollets, which was kept by his old quartermaster. It was two o'clock in the morning, the most perfect stillness prevailed, no one was there to watch his movements. The post-horses were put into the carriage (it came from a house in the Avenue de Paris in which an Englishman lived, and had been ordered in the foreigner's name to avoid raising suspicion). Castanier saw that he had his bills and his passports, stepped into the carriage, and set out. But at the barrier he saw two gendarmes lying

in wait for the carriage. A cry of horror burst from him, but Melmoth gave him a glance, and again the sound died in his throat.

"Keep your eyes on the stage, and be quiet!" said the Englishman.

In another moment Castanier saw himself flung into prison at the Conciergerie; and in the fifth act of the drama, entitled *The Cashier,* he saw himself, in three months' time, condemned to twenty years of penal servitude. Again a cry broke from him. He was exposed upon the Place du Palais-de-Justice, and the executioner branded him with a red-hot iron. Then came the last scene of all; among some sixty convicts in the prison yard of the Bicêtre, he was awaiting his turn to have the irons riveted on his limbs.

"Dear me! I cannot laugh any more! . . ." said Aquilina. "You are very solemn, dear boy; what can be the matter? The gentleman has gone."

"A word with you, Castanier," said Melmoth when the piece was at an end, and the attendant was fastening Mme. de la Garde's cloak.

The corridor was crowded, and escape impossible.

"Very well, what is it?"

"No human power can hinder you from taking Aquilina home, and going next to Versailles, there to be arrested."

"How so?"

"Because you are in a hand that will never relax its grasp," returned the Englishman.

Castanier longed for the power to utter some word that should blot him out from among living men and hide him in the lowest depths of hell.

"Suppose that the Devil were to make a bid for your soul, would you not give it to him now in exchange for the power of God? One single word, and those five hundred thousand francs shall be back in the Baron de Nucingen's safe; then you can tear up your letter of credit, and all traces of your crime will be obliterated. Moreover, you would have gold in torrents. You hardly believe in anything perhaps? Well,

if all this comes to pass, you will believe at least in the Devil."

"If it were only possible!" said Castanier joyfully.

"The man who can do it all gives you his word that it is possible," answered the Englishman.

Melmonth, Castanier, and Mme. de la Garde were standing out in the Boulevard when Melmoth raised his arm. A drizzling rain was falling, the streets were muddy, the air was close, there was thick darkness overhead; but in a moment, as the arm was outstretched, Paris was filled with sunlight; it was high noon on a bright July day. The trees were covered with leaves; a double stream of joyous holiday makers strolled beneath them. Sellers of liquorice water shouted their cool drinks. Splendid carriages rolled past along the streets. A cry of terror broke from the cashier, and at that cry rain and darkness once more settled down upon the Boulevard.

Mme. de la Garde had stepped into the carriage. "Do be quick, dear!" she cried; "either come in or stay out. Really, you are as dull as ditch-water this evening——"

"What must I do?" Castanier asked of Melmoth.

"Would you like to take my place?" inquired the Englishman.

"Yes."

"Very well, then; I will be at your house in a few moments."

"By the by, Castanier, you are rather off your balance," Aquilina remarked. "There is some mischief brewing: you were quite melancholy and thoughtful all through the play. Do you want anything that I can give you, dear? Tell me."

"I am waiting till we are at home to know whether you love me."

"You need not wait till then," she said, throwing her arms round his neck. "There!" she said, as she embraced him, passionately to all appearance, and plied him with the coaxing caresses that are part of the business of such a life as hers, like stage action for an actress.

"Where is the music?" asked Castanier.

"What next? Only think of your hearing music now!"

"Heavenly music!" he went on. "The sounds seem to come from above."

"What? You have always refused to give me a box at the Italiens because you could not abide music, and are you turning music-mad at this time of day? Mad—that you are! The music is inside your own noddle, old addle-pate!" she went on, as she took his head in her hands and rocked it to and fro on her shoulder. "Tell me now, old man; isn't it the creaking of the wheels that sings in your ears?"

"Just listen, Naqui! If the angels make music for God Almighty, it must be such music as this that I am drinking in at every pore, rather than hearing. I do not know how to tell you about it; it is as sweet as honey-water!"

"Why, of course, they have music in heaven, for the angels in all the pictures have harps in their hands. He is mad, upon my word!" she said to herself, as she saw Castanier's attitude; he looked like an opium-eater in a blissful trance.

They reached the house. Castanier, absorbed by the thought of all that he had just heard and seen, knew not whether to believe it or no; he was like a drunken man, and utterly unable to think connectedly. He came to himself in Aquilina's room, whither he had been supported by the united efforts of his mistress, the porter, and Jenny; for he had fainted as he stepped from the carriage.

"*He* will be here directly! Oh, my friends, my friends," he cried, and he flung himself despairingly into the depths of a low chair beside the fire.

Jenny heard the bell as he spoke, and admitted the Englishman. She announced that "a gentleman had come who had made an appointment with the master," when Melmoth suddenly appeared, and deep silence followed. He looked at the porter—the porter went; he looked at Jenny—and Jenny went likewise.

"Madame," said Melmoth, turning to Aquilina, "with your permission, we will conclude a piece of urgent business."

He took Castanier's hand, and Castanier rose, and the two men went into the drawing-room. There was no light in the room, but Melmoth's eyes lit up the thickest darkness. The gaze of those strange eyes had left Aquilina like one spellbound; she was helpless, unable to take any thought for her lover; moreover, she believed him to be safe in Jenny's room, whereas their early return had taken the wait-woman by surprise, and she had hidden the officer in the dressing-room. It had all happened exactly as in the drama that Melmoth had displayed for his victim. Presently the house-door was slammed violently, and Castanier reappeared.

"What ails you?" cried the horror-struck Aquilina.

There was a change in the cashier's appearance. A strange pallor overspread his once rubicund countenance; it wore the peculiarly sinister and stony look of the mysterious visitor. The sullen glare of his eyes was intolerable, the fierce light in them seemed to scorch. The man who had looked so good-humored and good-natured had suddenly grown tyrannical and proud. The courtesan thought that Castanier had grown thinner; there was a terrible majesty in his brow; it was as if a dragon breathed forth a malignant influence that weighed upon the others like a close, heavy atmosphere. For a moment Aquilina knew not what to do.

"What passed between you and that diabolical-looking man in those few minutes?" she asked at length.

"I have sold my soul to him. I feel it; I am no longer the same. He has taken my *self,* and given me his soul in exchange."

"What?"

"You would not understand it at all. . . . Ah! he was right," Castanier went on, "the fiend was right! I see everything and know all things.—You have been deceiving me!"

Aquilina turned cold with terror. Castanier lighted a candle and went into the dressing-room. The unhappy girl

followed him in dazed bewilderment, and great was her astonishment when Castanier drew the dresses that hung there aside and disclosed the sergeant.

"Come out, my boy," said the cashier; and, taking Léon by a button of his overcoat, he drew the officer into his room.

The Piedmontese, haggard and desperate, had flung herself into her easy-chair. Castanier seated himself on a sofa by the fire, and left Aquilina's lover in a standing position.

"You have been in the army," said Léon; "I am ready to give you satisfaction."

"You are a fool," said Castanier drily. "I have no occasion to fight. I could kill you by a look if I had any mind to do it. I will tell you what it is, youngster; why should I kill you? I can see a red line round your neck—the guillotine is waiting for you. Yes, you will end in the Place de Grève. You are the headsman's property! there is no escape for you. You belong to a *vendita* of the Carbonari. You are plotting against the Government."

"You did not tell me that," cried the Piedmontese, turning to Léon.

"So you do not know that the Minister decided this morning to put down your Society?" the cashier continued. "The Procureur-Général has a list of your names. You have been betrayed. They are busy drawing up the indictment at this moment."

"Then was it you who betrayed him?" cried Aquilina, and with a hoarse sound in her throat like the growl of a tigress she rose to her feet; she seemed as if she would tear Castanier in pieces.

"You know me too well to believe it," Castanier retorted. Aquilina was benumbed by his coolness.

"Then how do you know it?" she murmured.

"I did not know it until I went into the drawing-room; now I know it—now I see and know all things, and can do all things."

The sergeant was overcome with amazement.

"Very well then, save him, save him, dear!" cried the girl, flinging herself at Castanier's feet. "If nothing is impossible to you, save him! I will love you, I will adore you, I will be your slave and not your mistress. I will obey your wildest whims; you shall do as you will with me. Yes, yes, I will give you more than love; you shall have a daughter's devotion as well as . . . Rodolphe! why will you not understand! After all, however violent my passions may be, I shall be yours for ever! What should I say to persuade you? I will invent pleasures . . . I . . . Great heavens! one moment! whatever you shall ask of me—to fling myself from the window, for instance—you will need to say but one word, 'Léon!' and I will plunge down into hell. I would bear any torture, any pain of body or soul, anything you might inflict upon me!"

Castanier heard her with indifference. For all answer, he indicated Léon to her with a fiendish laugh.

"The guillotine is waiting for him," he repeated.

"No, no, no! He shall not leave this house. I will save him!" she cried. "Yes; I will kill any one who lays a finger upon him! Why will you not save him?" she shrieked aloud; her eyes were blazing, her hair unbound. "Can you save him?"

"I can do everything."

"Why do you not save him?"

"Why?" shouted Castanier, and his voice made the ceiling ring.—"Eh! it is my revenge! Doing evil is my trade!"

"Die?" said Aquilina; "must he die, my lover? Is it possible?"

She sprang up and snatched a stiletto from a basket that stood on the chest of drawers and went to Castanier, who began to laugh.

"You know very well that steel cannot hurt me now——"

Aquilina's arm suddenly dropped like a snapped harp string.

"Out with you, my good friend," said the cashier, turning to the sergeant, "and go about your business."

He held out his hand; the other felt Castanier's superior power, and could not choose but obey.

"This house is mine; I could send for the commissary of police if I chose, and give you up as a man who has hidden himself on my premises, but I would rather let you go; I am a fiend, I am not a spy."

"I shall follow him!" said Aquilina.

"Then follow him," returned Castanier.—"Here, Jenny ——"

Jenny appeared.

"Tell the porter to hail a cab for them.—Here, Naqui," said Castanier, drawing a bundle of bank-notes from his pocket; "you shall not go away like a pauper from a man who loves you still."

He held out three hundred thousand francs. Aquilina took the notes, flung them on the floor, spat on them, and trampled upon them in a frenzy of despair.

"We will leave this house on foot," she cried, "without a farthing of your money.—Jenny, stay where you are."

"Good-evening!" answered the cashier, as he gathered up the notes again. "I have come back from my journey.—Jenny," he added, looking at the bewildered waiting-maid, "you seem to me to be a good sort of girl. You have no mistress now. Come here. This evening you shall have a master."

Aquilina, who felt safe nowhere, went at once with the sergeant to the house of one of her friends. But all Léon's movements were suspiciously watched by the police, and after a time he and three of his friends were arrested. The whole story may be found in the newspapers of that day.

Castanier felt that he had undergone a mental as well as a physical transformation. The Castanier of old no longer existed—the boy, the young Lothario, the soldier who had proved his courage, who had been tricked into a marriage and disillusioned, the cashier, the passionate lover who had committed a crime for Aquilina's sake. His inmost nature had suddenly asserted itself. His brain had expanded, his senses

had developed. His thoughts comprehended the whole world; he saw all the things of earth as if he had been raised to some high pinnacle above the world.

Until that evening at the play he had loved Aquilina to distraction. Rather than give her up he would have shut his eyes to her infidelities; and now all that blind passion had passed away as a cloud vanishes in the sunlight.

Jenny was delighted to succeed to her mistress' position and fortune, and did the cashier's will in all things; but Castanier, who could read the inmost thoughts of the soul, discovered the real motive underlying this purely physical devotion. He amused himself with her, however, like a mischievous child who greedily sucks the juice of the cherry and flings away the stone. The next morning at breakfast time, when she was fully convinced that she was a lady and the mistress of the house, Castanier uttered one by one the thoughts that filled her mind as she drank her coffee.

"Do you know what you are thinking, child?" he said, smiling. "I will tell you: 'So all that lovely rosewood furniture that I coveted so much, and the pretty dresses that I used to try on, are mine now! All on easy terms that Madame refused, I do not know why. My word! if I might drive about in a carriage, have jewels and pretty things, a box at the theatre, and put something by! with me he should lead a life of pleasure fit to kill him if he were not as strong as a Turk! I never saw such a man!'—Was not that just what you were thinking," he went on, and something in his voice made Jenny turn pale. "Well, yes, child; you could not stand it, and I am sending you away for your own good; you would perish in the attempt. Come, let us part good friends," and he coolly dismissed her with a very small sum of money.

The first use that Castanier had promised himself that he would make of the terrible power bought at the price of his eternal happiness, was the full and complete indulgence of all his tastes.

He first put his affairs in order, readily settled his account with M. de Nucingen, who found a worthy German to

succeed him, and then determined on a carouse worthy of the palmiest days of the Roman Empire. He plunged into dissipation as recklessly as Belshazzar of old went to that last feast in Babylon. Like Belshazzar, he saw clearly through his revels a gleaming hand that traced his doom in letters of flame, not on the narrow walls of the banqueting-chamber, but over the vast spaces of heaven that the rainbow spans. His feast was not, indeed, an orgy confined within the limits of a banquet, for he squandered all the powers of soul and body in exhausting all the pleasures of earth. The table was in some sort earth itself, the earth that trembled beneath his feet. His was the last festival of the reckless spendthrift who has thrown all prudence to the winds. The devil had given him the key of the storehouse of human pleasures; he had filled and refilled his hands, and he was fast nearing the bottom. In a moment he had felt all that that enormous power could accomplish; in a moment he had exercised it, proved it, wearied of it. What had hitherto been the sum of human desires became as nothing. So often it happens that with possession the vast poetry of desire must end, and the thing possessed is seldom the thing that we dreamed of.

Beneath Melmoth's omnipotence lurked this tragical anticlimax of so many a passion, and now the inanity of human nature was revealed to his successor, to whom infinite power brought Nothingness as a dowry.

To come to a clear understanding of Castanier's strange position, it must be borne in mind how suddenly these revolutions of thought and feeling had been wrought; how quickly they had succeeded each other; and of these things it is hard to give any idea to those who have never broken the prison bonds of time, and space, and distance. His relation to the world without had been entirely changed with the expansion of his faculties.

Like Melmoth himself, Castanier could travel in a few moments over the fertile plains of India, could soar on the wings of demons above African desert spaces, or skim the surface of the seas. The same insight that could read the inmost

thoughts of others, could apprehend at a glance the nature of any material object, just as he caught as it were all flavors at once upon his tongue. He took his pleasure like a despot; a blow of the axe felled the tree that he might eat its fruits. The transitions, the alternations that measure joy and pain, and diversify human happiness, no longer existed for him. He had so completely glutted his appetites that pleasure must overpass the limits of pleasure to tickle a palate cloyed with satiety, and suddenly grown fastidious beyond all measure, so that ordinary pleasures became distasteful. Conscious that at will he was the master of all the women that he could desire, knowing that his power was irresistible, he did not care to exercise it; they were pliant to his unexpressed wishes, to his most extravagant caprices, until he felt a horrble thirst for love, and would have love beyond their power to give.

The world refused him nothing save faith and prayer, the soothing and consoling love that is not of this world. He was obeyed—it was a horrible position.

The torrents of pain, and pleasure, and thought that shook his soul and his bodily frame would have overwhelmed the strongest human being; but in him there was a power of vitality proportioned to the power of the sensations that assailed him. He felt within him a vague immensity of longing that earth could not satisfy. He spent his days on outspread wings, longing to traverse the luminous fields of space to other spheres that he knew afar by intuitive perception, a clear and hopeless knowledge. His soul dried up within him, for he hungered and thirsted after things that can neither be drunk nor eaten, but for which he could not choose but crave. His lips, like Melmoth's, burned with desire; he panted for the unknown, for he knew all things.

The mechanism and the scheme of the world was apparent to him, and its working interested him no longer; he did not long disguise the profound scorn that makes of a man of extraordinary powers a sphinx who knows everything and says nothing, and sees all things with an unmoved countenance. He felt not the slightest wish to communicate his knowledge

to other men. He was rich with all the wealth of the world, with one effort he could make the circle of the globe, and riches and power were meaningless for him. He felt the awful melancholy of omnipotence, a melancholy which Satan and God relieve by the exercise of infinite power in mysterious ways known to them alone. Castanier had not, like his Master, the inextinguishable energy of hate and malice; he felt that he was a devil, but a devil whose time was not yet come, while Satan is a devil through all eterniy, and being damned beyond redemption, delights to stir up the world, like a dung heap, with his triple fork and to thwart therein the designs of God. But Castanier, for his misfortune, had one hope left.

If in a moment he could move from one pole to the other as a bird springs restlessly from side to side in its cage, when, like the bird, he has crossed his prison, he saw the vast immensity of space beyond it. That vision of the Infinite left him for ever unable to see humanity and its affairs as other men saw them. The insensate fools who long for the power of the Devil gauge its desirability from a human standpoint; they do not see that with the Devil's power they will likewise assume his thoughts, and that they will be doomed to remain as men among creatures who will no longer understand them. The Nero unknown to history who dreams of setting Paris on fire for his private entertainment, like an exhibition of a burning house on the boards of a theatre, does not suspect that if he had that power, Paris would become for him as little interesting as an ant-heap by the roadside to a hurrying passer-by. The circle of the sciences was for Castanier something like a logogriph for a man who does not know the key to it. Kings and Governments were despicable in his eyes. His great debauch had been in some sort a deplorable farewell to his life as a man. The earth had grown too narrow for him, for the infernal gifts laid bare for him the secrets of creation—he saw the cause and foresaw its end. He was shut out from all that men call "heaven" in all languages under the sun; he could no longer think of heaven.

Then he came to understand the look on his predecessor's face and the drying up of the life within; then he knew all that was meant by the baffled hope that gleamed in Melmoth's eyes; he, too, knew the thirst that burned those red lips, and the agony of a continual struggle between two natures grown to giant size. Even yet he might be an angel, and he knew himself to be a fiend. His was the fate of a sweet and gentle creature that a wizard's malice has imprisoned in a misshapen form, entrapping it by a pact, so that another's will must set it free from its detested envelope.

As a deception only increases the ardor with which a man of really great nature explores the infinite of sentiment in a woman's heart, so Castanier awoke to find that one idea lay like a weight upon his soul, an idea which was perhaps the key to loftier spheres. The very fact that he had bartered away his eternal happiness led him to dwell in thought upon the future of those who pray and believe. On the morrow of his debauch, when he entered into the sober possession of his power, this idea made him feel himself a prisoner; he knew the burden of the woe that poets, and prophets, and great oracles of faith have set forth for us in such mighty words; he felt the point of the Flaming Sword plunged into his side, and hurried in search of Melmoth. What had become of his predecessor?

The Englishman was living in a mansion in the Rue Férou, near Saint-Sulpice—a gloomy, dark, damp, and cold abode. The Rue Férou itself is one of the most dismal streets in Paris; it has a north aspect like all the streets that lie at right angles to the left bank of the Seine, and the houses are in keeping with the site. As Castanier stood on the threshold he found that the door itself, like the vaulted roof, was hung with black; rows of lighted tapers shone brilliantly as though some king were lying in state; and a priest stood on either side of a catafalque that had been raised there.

"There is no need to ask why you have come, sir," the old hall porter said to Castanier; "you are so like our poor dear master that is gone. But if you are his brother, you have

come too late to bid him good-bye. The good gentleman died the night before last."

"How did he die?" Castanier asked of one of the priests.

"Set your mind at rest," said an old priest; he partly raised as he spoke the black pall that covered the catafalque.

Castanier, looking at him, saw one of those faces that faith has made sublime; the soul seemed to shine forth from every line of it, bringing light and warmth for other men, kindled by the unfailing charity within. This was Sir John Melmoth's confessor.

"Your brother made an end that men may envy, and that must rejoice the angels. Do you know what joy there is in heaven over a sinner that repents? His tears of pentience, excited by grace, flowed without ceasing; death alone checked them. The Holy Spirit dwelt in him. His burning words, full of lively faith, were worthy of the Prophet-King. If, in the course of my life, I have never heard a more dreadful confession than from the lips of this Irish gentleman, I have likewise never heard such fervent and passionate prayers. However great the measures of his sins may have been, his repentance has filled the abyss to overflowing. The hand of God was visibly stretched out above him, for he was completely changed, there was such heavenly beauty in his face. The hard eyes were softened by tears; the resonant voice that struck terror into those who heard it took the tender and compassionate tones of those who themselves have passed through deep humiliation. He so edified those who heard his words, that some who had felt drawn to see the spectacle of a Christian's death fell on their knees as he spoke of heavenly things, and of the infinite glory of God, and gave thanks and praise to Him. If he is leaving no worldly wealth to his family, no family can possess a greater blessing than this that he surely gained for them, a soul among the blessed, who will watch over you all and direct you in the path to heaven."

These words made such a vivid impression upon Castanier that he instantly hurried from the house to the Church of Saint-Sulpice, obeying what might be called a decree of fate. Melmoth's repentance had stupefied him.

At that time, on certain mornings in the week, a preacher, famed for his eloquence, was wont to hold conferences, in the course of which he demonstrated the truths of the Catholic faith for the youth of a generation proclaimed to be indifferent in matters of belief by another voice no less eloquent than his own. The conference had been put off to a later hour on account of Melmoth's funeral, so Castanier arrived just as the great preacher was epitomizing the proofs of a future existence of happiness with all the charm of eloquence and force of expression which have made him famous. The seeds of divine doctrine fell into a soil prepared for them in the old dragoon, into whom the Devil had glided. Indeed, if there is a phenomenon well attested by experience, is it not the spiritual phenomenon commonly called "the faith of the peasant"? The strength of belief varies inversely with the amount of use that a man has made of his reasoning faculties. Simple people and soldiers belong to the unreasoning class. Those who have marched through life beneath the banner of instinct are far more ready to receive the light than minds and hearts overwearied with the world's sophistries.

Castanier had the southern temperament; he had joined the army as a lad of sixteen, and had followed the French flag till he was nearly forty years old. As a common trooper, he had fought day and night, and day after day, and, as in duty bound, had thought of his horse first, and of himself afterwards. While he served his military apprenticeship, therefore, he had but little leisure in which to reflect on the destiny of man, and when he became an officer he had his men think of him. He had been swept from battlefield to battlefield, but he had never thought of what comes after death. A soldier's life does not demand much thinking. Those who cannot understand the lofty political ends involved and the interests of nation and nation; who cannot grasp political schemes as well as plans of campaign, and combine the science of the tactician with that of the administrator, are bound to live in a state of ignorance; the most

boorish peasant in the most backward district in France is scarcely in a worse case. Such men as these bear the brunt of war, yield passive obedience to the brain that directs them, and strike down the men opposed to them as the woodcutter fells timber in the forest. Violent physical exertion is succeeded by times of inertia, when they repair the waste. They fight and drink, fight and eat, fight and sleep, that they may the better deal hard blows; the powers of the mind are not greatly exercised in this turbulent round of existence, and the character is as simple as heretofore.

When the men who have shown such energy on the battlefield return to ordinary civilization, most of those who have not risen to high rank seem to have acquired no ideas, and to have no aptitude, no capacity, for grasping new ideas. To the utter amazement of a younger generation, those who made our armies so glorious and so terrible are as simple as children, and as slow-witted as a clerk at his worst, and the captain of a thundering squadron is scarcely fit to keep a merchant's day-book. Old soldiers of this stamp, therefore, being innocent of any attempt to use their reasoning faculties, act upon their strongest impulses. Castanier's crime was one of those matters that raise so many questions, that, in order to debate about it, a moralist might call for its "discussion by clauses," to make use of a parliamentary expression.

Passion had counseled the crime; the cruelly irresistible power of feminine witchery had driven him to commit it; no man can say of himself, "I will never do that," when a siren joins in the combat and throws her spells over him.

So the word of life fell upon a conscience newly awakened to the truths of religion which the French Revolution and a soldier's career had forced Castanier to neglect. The solemn words, "You will be happy or miserable for all eternity!" made but the more terrible impression upon him, because he had exhausted earth and shaken it like a barren tree; because his desires could effect all things, so that it was enough that any spot in earth or heaven should be forbidden him, and he forthwith thought of nothing else. If it were allowable to

compare such great things with social follies, Castanier's position was not unlike that of a banker who, finding that his all-powerful millions cannot obtain for him an entrance into the society of the noblesse, must set his heart upon entering that circle, and all the social privileges that he has already acquired are as nothing in his eyes from the moment when he discovers that a single one is lacking.

Here was a man more powerful than all the kings on earth put together; a man who, like Satan, could wrestle with God Himself; leaning against one of the pillars in the Church of Saint-Sulpice, weighed down by the feelings and thoughts that oppressed him, and absorbed in the thought of a Future, the same thought that had engulfed Melmoth.

"He was very happy, was Melmoth!" cried Castanier. "He died in the certain knowledge that he would go to heaven."

In a moment the greatest possible change had been wrought in the cashier's ideas. For several days he had been a devil, now he was nothing but a man; an image of the fallen Adam, of the sacred tradition embodied in all cosmogonies. But while he had thus shrunk to man's he retained a germ of greatness, he had been steeped in the Infinite. The power of hell had revealed the divine power. He thirsted for heaven as he had never thirsted after the pleasures of earth, that are so soon exhausted. The enjoyments which the fiend promises are but the enjoyments of earth on a larger scale, but to the joys of heaven there is no limit. He believed in God, and the spell that gave him the treasures of the world was as nothing to him now; the treasures themselves seemed to him as contemptible as pebbles to an admirer of diamonds; they were but gewgaws compared with the eternal glories of the other life. A curse lay, he thought, on all things that came to him from this source. He sounded dark depths of painful thought as he listened to the service performed for Melmoth. The *Dies iræ* filled him with awe; he felt all the grandeur of that cry of a repentant soul trembling before the Throne of God. The Holy Spirit, like a devouring flame, passed through him as fire consumes straw.

The tears were falling from his eyes when—"Are you a relation of the dead?" the beadle asked him.

"I am his heir," Castanier answered.

"Give something for the expenses of the services!" cried the man.

"No," said the cashier. (The Devil's money should not go to the Church.)

"For the poor!"

"No."

"For repairing the Church!"

"No."

"The Lady Chapel!"

"No."

"For the schools!"

"No."

Castanier went, not caring to expose himself to the sour looks that the irritated functionaries gave him.

Outside, in the street, he looked up at the Church of Saint-Sulpice. "What made people build the giant cathedrals I have seen in every country?" he asked himself. "The feeling shared so widely throughout all time must surely be based upon something."

"Something! Do you call God *something?*" cried his conscience. "God! God! God! . . ."

The word was echoed and re-echoed by an inner voice, till it overwhelmed him; but his feeling of terror subsided as he heard sweet distant sounds of music that he had caught faintly before. They were singing in the church, he thought, and his eyes scanned the great doorway. But as he listened more closely, the sounds poured upon him from all sides; he looked round the square, but there was no sign of any musicians. The melody brought visions of a distant heaven and far-off gleams of hope; but it also quickened the remorse that had set the lost soul in a ferment. He went on his way through Paris, walking as men walk who are crushed beneath the burden of their sorrow, seeing everything with unseeing eyes, loitering like an idler, stopping without cause, muttering to

himself, careless of the traffic, making no effort to avoid a blow from a plank of timber.

Imperceptibly repentance brought him under the influence of the divine grace that soothes while it bruises the heart so terribly. His face came to wear a look of Melmoth, something great, with a trace of madness in the greatness. A look of dull and hopeless distress, mingled with the excited eagerness of hope, and, beneath it all, a gnawing sense of loathing for all that the world can give. The humblest of prayers lurked in the eyes that saw with such dreadful clearness. His power was the measure of his anguish. His body was bowed down by the fearful storm that shook his soul, as the tall pines bend before the blast. Like his predecessor, he could not refuse to bear the burden of life; he was afraid to die while he bore the yoke of hell. The torment grew intolerable.

At last, one morning, he bethought himself how that Melmoth (now among the blessed) had made the proposal of an exchange, and how that he had accepted it; others, doubtless, would follow his example; for in an age proclaimed, by the inheritors of the eloquence of the Fathers of the Church, to be fatally indifferent to religion, it should be easy to find a man who would accept the conditions of the contract in order to prove its advantages.

"There is one place where you can learn what kings will fetch in the market; where nations are weighed in the balance and systems appraised; where the value of a government is stated in terms of the five-franc piece; where ideas and beliefs have their price, and everything is discounted; where God Himself, in a manner, borrows on the security of His revenue of souls, for the Pope has a running account there. Is it not there that I should go to traffic in souls?"

Castanier went quite joyously on 'Change, thinking that it would be as easy to buy a soul as to invest money in the Funds. Any ordinary person would have feared ridicule, but Castanier knew by experience that a desperate man takes everything seriously. A prisoner lying under sentence of death would

listen to the madman who should tell him that by pronouncing some gibberish he could escape through the keyhole; for suffering is credulous, and clings to an idea until it fails, as the swimmer borne along by the current clings to the branch that snaps in his hand.

Towards four o'clock that afternoon Castanier appeared among the little knots of men who were transacting private business after 'Change. He was personally known to some of the brokers; and while affecting to be in search of an acquaintance, he managed to pick up the current gossip and rumors of failure.

"Catch me negotiating bills for Claparon & Co., my boy, The bank collector went round to return their acceptances to them this morning," said a fat banker in his outspoken way. "If you have any of their paper, look out."

Claparon was in the building, in deep consultation with a man well known for the ruinous rate at which he lent money. Castanier went forthwith in search of the said Claparon, a merchant who had a reputation for taking heavy risks that meant wealth or utter ruin. The money-lender walked away as Castanier came up. A gesture betrayed the speculator's despair.

"Well, Claparon, the Bank wants a hundred thousand francs of you, and it is four o'clock; the thing is known, and it is too late to arrange your little failure comfortably," said Castanier.

"Sir!"

"Speak lower," the cashier went on. "How if I were to propose a piece of business that would bring you in as much money as you require?"

"It would not discharge my liabilities; every business that I ever heard of wants a little time to simmer in."

"I know of something that will set you straight in a moment," answered Castanier; "but first you would have to——"

"Do what?"

"Sell your share of paradise. It is a matter of business

like anything else, isn't it? We all hold shares in the great Speculation of Eternity."

"I tell you this," said Claparon angrily. "that I am just the man to lend you a slap in the face. When a man is in trouble, it is no time to play silly jokes on him."

"I am talking seriously," said Castanier, and he drew a bundle of notes from his pocket.

"In the first place," said Claparon, "I am not going to sell my soul to the Devil for a trifle. I want five hundred thousand francs before I strike——"

"Who talks of stinting you?" asked Castanier, cutting him short. "You should have more gold than you could stow in the cellars of the Bank of France."

He held out a handful of notes. That decided Claparon.

"Done," he cried; "but how is the bargain to be made?"

"Let us go over yonder, no one is standing there," said Castanier, pointing to a corner of the court.

Claparon and his tempter exchanged a few words, with their faces turned to the wall. None of the onlookers guessed the nature of this by-play, though their curiosity was keenly excited by the strange gestures of the two contracting parties. When Castanier returned, there was a sudden outburst of amazed exclamation. As in the Assembly where the least event immediately attracts attention, all faces were turned to the two men who had caused the sensation, and a shiver passed through all beholders at the change that had taken place in them.

The men who form the moving crowd that fills the Stock Exchange are soon known to each other by sight. They watch each other like players round a card-table. Some shrewd observers can tell how a man will play and the condition of his exchequer from a survey of his face; and the Stock Exchange is simply a vast card-table. Every one, therefore, had noticed Claparon and Castanier. The latter (like the Irishman before him) had been muscular and powerful, his eyes were full of light, his color high. The dignity and power in his face had struck awe into them all; they wondered how old

Castanier had come by it; and now they beheld Castanier divested of his power, shrunken, wrinkled, aged, and feeble. He had drawn Claparon out of the crowd with the energy of a sick man in a fever fit; he had looked like an opium-eater during the brief period of excitement that the drug can give; now, on his return, he seemed to be in the condition of utter exhaustion in which the patient dies after the fever departs, or to be suffering from the horrible prostration that follows on excessive indulgence in the delights of narcotics. The infernal power that had upheld him through his debauches had left him, and the body was left unaided and alone to endure the agony of remorse and the heavy burden of sincere repentance. Claparon's troubles every one could guess; but Claparon reappeared, on the other hand, with sparkling eyes, holding his head high with the pride of Lucifer. The crisis had passed from the one man to the other.

"Now can you drop off with an easy mind, old man," said Claparon to Castanier.

"For pity's sake, send for a cab and for a priest; send for the curate of Saint-Sulpice!" answered the old dragoon, sinking down upon the curbstone.

The words "a priest" reached the ears of several people, and produced uproarious jeering among the stockbrokers, for faith with these gentlemen means a belief that a scrap of paper called a mortgage represents an estate, and the List of Fundholders is their Bible.

"Shall I have time to repent?" said Castanier to himself, in a piteous voice, that impressed Claparon.

A cab carried away the dying man; the speculator went to the bank at once to meet his bills; and the momentary sensation produced upon the throng of business men by the sudden change on the two faces, vanished like the furrow cut by a ship's keel in the sea. News of the greatest importance kept the attention of the world of commerce on the alert; and when commercial interests are at stake, Moses might appear with his two luminous horns, and his coming would scarcely receive the honors of a pun, the gentlemen whose business it is to write the Market Reports would ignore his existence.

When Claparon had made his payments, fear seized upon him. There was no mistake about his power. He went on 'Change again, and offered his bargain to other men in embarrassed circumstances. The Devil's bond, "together with the rights, easements, and privileges appertaining thereunto," —to use the expression of the notary who succeeded Claparon, changed hands for the sum of seven hundred thousand francs. The notary in his turn parted with the agreement with the Devil for five hundred thousand francs to a building contractor in difficulties, who likewise was rid of it to an iron merchant in consideration of a hundred thousand crowns. In fact, by five o'clock people had ceased to believe in the strange contract, and purchasers were lacking for want of confidence.

At half-past five the holder of the bond was a house-painter, who was lounging by the door of the building in the Rue Feydeau, where at that time stockbrokers temporarily congregated. The house-painter, simple fellow, could not think what was the matter with him. He "felt all anyhow"; so he told his wife when he went home.

The Rue Feydeau, as idlers about town are aware, is a place of pilgrimage for youths who for lack of a mistress bestow their ardent affection upon the whole sex. On the first floor of the most rigidly respectable domicile therein dwelt one of those exquisite creatures whom it has pleased heaven to endow with the rarest and most surpassing beauty. As it is impossible that they should all be duchesses or queens (since there are many more pretty women in the world than titles and thrones for them to adorn), they are content to make a stockbroker or a banker happy at a fixed price. To this good-natured beauty, Euphrasia by name, an unbounded ambition had led a notary's clerk to aspire. In short, the second clerk in the office of Maître Crottat, notary, had fallen in love with her, as youth at two-and-twenty can fall in love. The scrivener would have murdered the Pope and run amuck through the whole sacred college to procure the miserable sum of a hundred louis to pay for a shawl which had turned

Euphrasia's head, at which price her waiting-woman had promised that Euphrasia should be his. The infatuated youth walked to and fro under Madame Euphrasia's windows, like the polar bears in their cage at the Jardin des Plantes, with his right hand thrust beneath his waistcoat in the region of the heart, which he was fit to tear from his bosom, but as yet he had only wrenched at the elastic of his braces.

"What can one do to raise ten thousand francs?" he asked himself. "Shall I make off with the money that I must pay on the registration of that conveyance? Good heavens! my loan would not ruin the purchaser, a man with seven millions! And then next day I would fling myself at his feet and say, 'I have taken ten thousand francs belonging to you, sir; I am twenty-two years of age, and I am in love with Euphrasia —that is my story. My father is rich, he will pay you back; do not ruin me! Have not you yourself been twenty-two years old and madly in love?' But these beggarly landowners have no souls! He would be quite likely to give me up to the public prosecutor, instead of taking pity upon me. Good God! if it were only possible to sell your soul to the Devil! But there is neither a God nor a Devil; it is all nonsense out of nursery tales and old wives' talk. What shall I do?"

"If you have a mind to sell your soul to the Devil, sir," said the house-painter, who had overheard something that the clerk let fall, "you can have the ten thousand francs."

"And Euphrasia!" cried the clerk, as he struck a bargain with the devil that inhabited the house-painter.

The pact concluded, the frantic clerk went to find the shawl, and mounted Madame Euphrasia's staircase; and as (literally) the devil was in him, he did not come down for twelve days, drowning the thought of hell and of his privileges in twelve days of love and riot and forgetfulness, for which he had bartered away all his hopes of a paradise to come.

And in this way the secret of the vast power discovered and acquired by the Irishman, the offspring of Mathurin's brain,

was lost to mankind; and the various Orientalists, Mystics, and Archæologists who take an interest in these matters were unable to hand down to posterity the proper method of invoking the Devil, for the following sufficient reasons:

On the thirteenth day after these frenzied nuptials the wretched clerk lay on a pallet bed in a garret in his master's house in the Rue Saint-Honoré. Shame, the stupid goddess who dares not behold herself, had taken possession of the young man. He had fallen ill; he would nurse himself; misjudged the quantity of a remedy devised by the skill of a practitioner well known on the walls of Paris, and succumbed to the effects of an overdose of mercury. His corpse was as black as a mole's back. A devil had left unmistakable traces of its passage there; could it have been Ashtaroth?

"The estimable youth to whom you refer has been carried away to the planet Mercury," said the head clerk to a German demonologist who came to investigate the matter at first hand.

"I am quite prepared to believe it," answered the Teuton.

"Oh!"

"Yes, sir," returned the other. "The opinion you advance coincides with the very words of Jacob Boehme. In the forty-eighth proposition of *The Threefold Life of Man* he says that 'if God hath brought all things to pass with a LET THERE BE, the FIAT is the secret matrix which comprehends and apprehends the nature which is formed by the spirit born of Mercury and of God.'"

"What do you say, sir?"

The German delivered his quotation afresh.

"We do not know it," said the clerks.

"*Fiat?* . . . " said a clerk. "*Fiat lux!*"

"You can verify the citation for yourselves," said the German. "You will find the passage in the *Treatise of the Threefold Life of Man,* page 75; the edition was published by M. Migneret in 1809. It was translated into French by a philosopher who had a great admiration for the famous shoemaker."

"Oh! he was a shoemaker, was he?" said the head clerk.

"In Prussia," said the German.

"Did he work for the King of Prussia?" inquired a Bœotian of a second clerk.

"He must have vamped up his prose," said a third.

"That man is colossal!" cried the fourth, pointing to the Teuton.

That gentleman, though a demonologist of the first rank, did not know the amount of devilry to be found in a notary's clerk. He went away without the least idea that they were making game of him, and fully under the impression that the young fellows regarded Boehme as a colossal genius.

"Education is making strides in France," said he to himself.

PARIS, *May* 6, 1835.

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Balzac, Honoré de
Comédie humaine

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